

Sermon for the 18th Sunday after Trinity (7th October 2012)

Watchword: "Whoever loves God must also love his brother." (1Jo 4:21 NIV)

OT: **Ex.20,1-17** (10 Commandments); Epistle: **Rom.14,17-19** (Peace & mutual edification)

Gospel: **Mk.12,28-34** (Most important commandment)

James 2,1-13: *My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*

God let's it rain and even pour over good and evil, saints and sinners, heroes and villains – indiscriminately, without showing any favouritism – just as he lets his sun shine over all of us without differentiating between rich and poor, high or low, white or black, men or women, adults or children, urban or rural people, educated or not. He loves them and all of us as his very own – and wants that all of them and us to be helped and blessed by the knowledge of his gospel truth and have eternal, blissful life and salvation in and through him – now and forever. That's his good fatherly will of grace, peace and mercy for all and everybody – you and me included! To protect this godly life and creation God has given us his good and perfect law as we just heard in the 10 commandments: *Love, trust and fear God above all else with all your heart, mind and soul – and love your neighbour as yourself.* That's God's recipe to guard his perfect world and that serves as his protective screen and sanctuary against all evil threats and assaults from chaotic forces and sinful enemies threatening to intrude his good, peaceful and flourishing realm and which oppose him and his own with continuous rebellion, strife and blatant warfare. The Christian Church and holy congregation is made up of all the people of God, his blessed family of forgiven sinners from the ends of the earth, big and small and all heirs of heaven, citizens and members of God's universal household – gathered and called into the kingdom of his sanctified dominion. Everybody, who is baptized belongs into this one holy Christian Church across the globe and throughout the ages. That's only and entirely due to the forgiving grace of our God. He has introduced and inducted every one of us into this divine family and heavenly relationship because he has loved us as his very special creatures from the very beginning – even before we were born he has chosen us to be his and part of his godly affiliation – never to be separated from him by anything or anyone ever. Under his loving care he wants us to prosper and flourish by abiding forever faithfully in his grace, mercy and peace. Listening obediently to his most gracious will in both the Old and the New Testament, thriving faithfully on his gospel promises, feeding on his most wholesome food in his most holy supper, rejoicing with the blessed communion of Christian saints in psalms, hymns and spiritual song, assured of him hearing and answering our prayers, lamentations and petitions for each other, the Church and its mission, this country and all the people of this world. It's truly a most blessed venue and assembly – this holy Christian Church. That's why we don't tire of confessing: *O Lord – I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells!*

Well, you know as well as I do – this perfect world of our God is under duress. We've left paradise ages ago. Even God's dearest children just too often spoil his wonderful scenario with selfish ways, cruel discrimination and loveless habits. You surely recall the indignation with which the inner circle of Jesus' friends – the disciples – repulsed quite harshly those mothers bringing children to Jesus. Well, Jesus rebuke them in turn: "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*" (**Luk 18:16**) Or remember those many people who tried to stop Bartimaeus from getting to Jesus, when he began to shout, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "*Son of David, have mercy on me!*" Jesus stopped and said, "*Call him.*" So they called to the blind man, "*Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.*" (**Mar 10:47-49**) Or those pious and devout leaders, who were quite resentful when Jesus welcomed tax-collectors and other sinful people living outside the religious establishment of his time to be around and about with him: "*But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*" (**Luk 15:2**) For their benefit Jesus tells the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son and concludes: '*My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*" (**Luk 15:31-32**) See – this very active inclusion of those discriminated, side-lined and outcast by poverty, illness, age or profession – like shepherds and fishermen, prostitutes, tax-collectors, lepers and demon possessed, even Samaritans and other heathens and gentiles - into his inner circle of friends and into God's holy family was not just a once-off thing with Jesus. No, it was part and parcel of his godly plan and mission strategy from the word go. Already in Nazareth he proclaims this divine calling with words of the prophet Isaiah: "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" (**Luk 4:18-19**) And that is what he wants his Christian Church to practice even today. Remember how he rebukes his special apostle St. Peter – the confessor and preacher of Pentecost – in Joppe? Well, he said to him: "*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.*" St. Peter learnt this from God himself and later taught the Church: "*I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism!*" (**Acts 10:15.34**)

Well, you know, St. Peter was a slow learner. Probably so that we, who sometimes learn even slower still could also eventually grasp and get it too. See, in Antioch this very same Peter, who had made such a strong and clear confession first in Jerusalem and then in Joppe and also in Caesarea once again failed dismally and discriminated faithlessly against gentile Christians – by separating from them, not eating with them anymore as before - and just because he was afraid of offending his own people – “*ons mense*” - the Christians with Jewish background like himself. St. Paul describes that in his letter to the Galatians in the 2nd chapter. As in all those situations of confession it was given to him from above – through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit – to repent and return to the faithful way of his Lord Jesus Christ + His mercy triumphs over judgment. Hallelujah - praise be to God for that. Again and again this calamity of wrongful discrimination has overcome Christian congregations. Contrary to God's good will of unity in faith and truth, in holy living and worship for his people in the Church – his very own people have discriminated against others for many different reasons. That's why we are to hear this relevant admonition of St. James even today so that we too overcome wrongful discrimination and are open and welcoming to those, who want to come and be part of God's family too. Both rich and poor are to have a seat here and everybody is to be received friendly and made to feel at home in this house of God whether he is young or old, Zulu or Afrikaans or Sudanese. That's the message of St. James today. Thankfully God is merciful and gracious to us – and does not deal with us according to our sins or iniquities, but rather forgives and heals them by his loving kindness and mercy. His mercy covers our wrongdoing – even that of wrongful discrimination – and allows us to see our neighbour in a new way – namely as sibling in Jesus family and as a fellow citizen of God's holy city and eternal kingdom and as a joint heir of heaven and paradise. A stranger is therefore no longer a threat to my identity or my god-given destiny and calling, but rather I can see him as a god-given brother and/or sister on the way to the eternal fatherland under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in the close relationship of Christ's brotherhood: Both creatures and children of God, saved solely by forgiveness of all sin and evil, redeemed and justified by the saving grace of Jesus Christ and called, enlightened and kept in this the true faith in our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ through the gracious workings of the Holy Spirit. Praise be to the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.