

Cantate
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University Lutheran Chapel
Minneapolis, Minnesota

+ Jesu juva +

John 16:5-15

Grace, mercy, and peace be with you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Perhaps one of the hardest parts to any friendship or relationship is saying farewell. To leave each other knowing very well that you may not see each other again, or if you do, it will be a long time hence. Sure, we say goodbye every day, but its usually with the German certainty of auf wieder sehen, I shall see you again. So when those we love, those friends we hold dear who have been with us through our most difficult times, who celebrated with us, who mourned with us, when they move across the country, when the circumstances of life require that they leave us, sorrow fills our hearts. Whether its our children leaving to go off to college, our students or friends moving across the country for a new job, sorrow still fills us despite their departure being for their benefit, knowing full well that we can't go with them, but our hearts will still miss them. Even in a Christian death we make this farewell, for they go where we cannot yet follow and their going from us is a pain and grief we bear.

Such is the pain and sorrow of the disciples when Jesus tells them that it is necessary for Him to now go away and return to the Father. Their master, their teacher, their dearest friend is leaving them and there is almost undoubtedly frustration and confusion as to why. What is to be done after He goes? How can they return to the way things were before He came after everything He has done? For in their grief, they expect that as Jesus leaves them, so does their hope. They fear that sickness will return, demons will oppress and death shall rule, for that was how things were before Jesus came, before God became man. Yet Jesus speaks comfort to these men who worry and wrestle with doubt, for He reveals to them the promise of how things are to be, the completion of the divine plan that has been set in motion since the fall of Adam.

For in only a few hours after this discourse, our Lord departs down the lonely road through Gethsemane up the hill of Golgotha. He bore the heavy load that none of the disciples could bear with Him as our Lord was crucified for the sins of the world, for our justification. It was for this reason that He came into the world, to go where we could not follow and win a battle that we could not fight. But the fullness of that victory could not be given and delivered to us while our Lord remained where mortal eyes could see Him, where eyes of faith were weakened by eyes of the flesh. So it was also for the purpose of this justification that He did not tarry after His resurrection, but soon departed and ascended into heaven. For had He remained, our human eyes would behold Him and so our faith would be stunted, for our flesh would deceive us into thinking the victory of the cross was only a physical and temporal thing. If we could make a pilgrimage from around the world to see the risen man who lives and never dies, you can be sure everyone would flock to see such a wonder and impossibility. But faith at such seeing would not be guaranteed, for even moments before our Lord's ascension, Matthew tells us

that still some of the disciples doubted. Faith does not come from our eyes, for though the world of science claims this as standard truth, seeing is not believing. The Pharisees saw the miracles and signs of Christ, yet it was their disbelief that crucified our Lord. Rather, faith comes by hearing. Faith comes from outside of ourselves and is worked in us, and it is the Comforter who works such great miracles in our hearts. Jesus won for us the victory over sin, death, and the devil, and it is the Holy Spirit who assures you that He won it for you. So, the going away of Jesus was for our good, for by His going He sent the Holy Spirit who brings to us the comfort and hope in this valley of sorrow that the fruits of Christ's victory are our reward in faith.

For Jesus, in sending the Holy Spirit, does not indicate that He was never present or not active in the world up to this point, for the faith of all the saints and the words of the prophets would beg to differ. Rather, He indicates that the fullness of God's work is revealed and completed in each person of the Trinity. We know the Father because we have known the Son who is the image of the Father, and we know the Son because the Holy Spirit has made Him known to us. For the Spirit does not speak on His own authority, but by the Word of Truth to whom He bears witness. So, by the Spirit, the glory of Christ is revealed to us, the victory of the cross for men and women broken and afflicted by sin and iniquity.

As we sojourn in this life, we need the comfort of a peace that is outside of ourselves, the constant nourishment of faith as the world and the prince of it try to discredit and disprove the very faith that we have been given. For our ears are assaulted by the twisting of the truth as we hear that sin can only be relegated to certain things, perhaps breaking only certain parts of the law. And our eyes try to affirm this reality, for surely, we see good people all around us. Sure, that couple may be living in a gay relationship, but they are so nice and kind. That man down the street may pray to Allah, but he takes care of the poor and helps the sick. And so the world tries to justify that sin is only doing bad things to people, only breaking the law or certain select parts of a moral code. But the Holy Spirit was sent to convict the world of sin, to show that no measure of civil righteousness or "good" works is sufficient to keep the law. For if faith is absent, all good or kind or pious acts are sinful. The Comforter comes to convict the world of sin because if we ignore our condition and need, there is no hope that we can partake in, no victory in which we can be given a share. So, by His convicting the world of sin, the Spirit of God shows that we are justified by our faith in Christ.

Further, as the Spirit convicts the world of sin, so too does He convict it of righteousness. One could put the relationship between these two, that is the convicting of sin and righteousness, into familiar Lutheran lingo by describing these two as Law and Gospel. The Spirit cuts our hearts showing us our sins, then delivers us the Gospel, that healing balm of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. This is the sweet comfort to which our ears have been trained to listen for and long to hear every time we come through those chapel doors or hear the preaching of God's word. But as the Spirit speaks comfort to us who hear the words of forgiveness and salvation, conversely, so too does He convict those who preach and promote a false gospel. This

would be the “gospel” of good works, of self-righteousness by our own merits. This is the faith of the Pharisees, the faith Luther fought against in Rome, the faith of today’s prosperity Gospel. This would include the notion that if we have the right spiritual experiences or the appropriate emotional distress or response, we can earn or even cooperate with the Spirit to be saved. In truth, such a “gospel” is the same message that every heathen and pagan religion promotes, and even associating the title gospel to this false doctrine does violence to the true Gospel of the Christian faith. For any who proclaim a righteousness apart from Christ, who promote salvation or hope of life through any other means, even if it is our participation, they teach a different message and are of a different spirit. As Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, “If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received (that is, the gospel of Christ Jesus), let him be anathema.” Let him be accursed. The righteousness to which our hope clings is the righteousness of Christ, the works of our savior done in our stead, a righteousness bestowed upon each of us in the waters of our baptism.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is for this message that the world hates us and condemns us. It is on account of the exclusivity of the Christian faith and the salvation won for us by our savior that the world despises us and would see our downfall. It is not exclusivity based upon ethnicity or nationality, being male or female, social status, occupation, age or any other such distinctions. It does not distinguish between if you murdered in cold blood or lied to your wife. The exclusivity lies in the object of faith. Those who believe in Jesus, that He died for the penalty of our sins and rose again, they have life on account of that faith, because they trust in the promises of God. But all others who add qualifiers, who insert themselves into the equation and rob Christ of His glory, they are condemned. For it is not in God that they trust, but in man. So, because we cling to this hope and reject the doctrines of the world, we are condemned by the world. We are labeled as bigots and misogynists, discriminatory and of hating our fellow men. We are judged by the world with all its malice, and so the Church has suffered under this persecution all her life for this hate. But such accusations fall empty and without any bite or sting, because the Holy Spirit has already judged the ruler of this world. Satan has been defeated, routed and judged in the crucifixion of our Lord, so while the world echoes the hollow sweetness of the devil’s lies and deception, they stand condemned along with their master.

The Holy Spirit is our comfort in this life, for it is by Him that our hearts are strengthened and ears opened to hear the Word of God, to hear the true Gospel message that our sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ, that neither our hope nor our faith are in vain. What joy! What comfort! For if the Spirit of God goes forth with us, what weapon or lie or accusation of our foe can do us any harm? Which of them can rob us of our faith? By the strengthening of the Spirit, not a single one, for by Him we are nourished in the one true faith by the body and blood of our Lord, by the preaching of God’s, so that we trust in the promise of Christ whom we have not seen, but shall one day know face to face to the glory of God. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard and protect you in the one true faith from now until life everlasting. Amen.