

Sermon for Easter 5 – John 16:5-15

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Christ tells His disciples that He will send them the Comforter. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter. He comforts us by telling us the truth. But people often look for comfort in lies. They trust in the lie that money will bring them satisfaction and security by hoarding it. But that lie never satisfies and leaves life empty. They try drugs, or abuse alcohol, or something else which promises to take away the pain of living the harsh realities of our fallen creation. And they do get a temporary happiness, a good feeling that can last for a while. But true and lasting comfort is deeper than how you feel. The Comforter gives us comfort by telling us the truth. The Holy Spirit tells us the truth about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment. The Comforter gives us lasting comfort against the world's lies.

For the world speaks as it knows. The world gives us false comfort. What the world calls sin is not sin. For the world calls sin whatever offends the world. And nothing more offends the world than the truth that God came into this world and took on human flesh and died in our place because we cannot save ourselves. Instead, the world teaches a bloodless religion. There is no need for God to become man. There is no need for a Savior to die. Whatever trouble sin and human weakness may cause, it's surely within our power to overcome it. There is no guilt and shame which the human spirit cannot conquer. There is no weakness and frailty through which man's ingenuity cannot advance. There is no sin for which humanity's goodwill and love cannot atone.

But the Comforter disagrees. The world is wrong. He convicts the world concerning sin. Sin is too deep for us to fathom. It is too strong for us to conquer. The evil that enslaves humanity – that resides deep down in our hearts – is too powerful for any human solution. Sin requires nothing less than the sacrifice of God's eternal Son made flesh on the cross to forgive us and to destroy sin's power over our lives. Christ is not an option for us sinners. He is a necessity.

Because the world is wrong about sin, it is also wrong about righteousness. By making sin less than sin, it makes righteousness less than righteousness. So what the world calls righteousness is not real righteousness. What the world calls righteousness is displaying to others how good we are, which is really the essence of all human religion. The world prefers what it can see. The world prefers what it can measure. The world prefers what it can show off before others. The world's righteousness is adding up the points, counting the credits, gaining the merits, and winning recognition from the world. If you can look squeaky clean on the outside, you must be righteous. Christ says of such people, "Truly they have their reward."

The world is wrong about righteousness. So the Comforter convicts the world concerning righteousness. He does this by showing that Christ has gone to the Father where we can see Him no longer. And so He offers us a righteousness that we cannot see, because real righteousness is not something you can see, it is not something you can measure, it is not something you can display to others. Real righteousness is received in repentance. It does not lift up good deeds for recognition and praise. Real righteousness beats the breast and prays with the tax collector in the temple, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

Because the world is wrong about sin and because the world is wrong about righteousness, it is also wrong about judgment. What the world calls judgment is not judgment. The world's ruler and prince is the devil. Of course, Satan isn't in control of the world, nor does he govern it. Christ

does. But the devil does govern the thinking of those who belong to this world and who don't know Christ. The overarching creed of our post-modern, post-truth, everything-is-tolerated times is "You shall not judge." But in an ironic twist, those who believe this way bind themselves to judge others, because there is no justification for them outside of judging others. Why is that?

Since people don't enjoy the forgiveness of their own sins, they must be constantly looking at the sins of others. Since they don't have the righteousness of Christ that is received by faith alone, they must constantly be comparing themselves to others to see if they are more righteous than them. They become what they themselves despise most. They all go around judging their neighbors. They would never admit this, but their religion is based on standing in judgment of others, because there simply is no other justification to stand on. Since they have no forgiveness, they have no life.

But in reality, only those who know they are forgiven in Christ can live and forgive. You can't give what you don't have. Only those who know they are righteous through Christ's merit can stop their constant judging of others. Only those who have Christ can rest secure that they have passed through judgment and into life.

Satan, the prince of this world, also judges. He judges us Christians. He judges us falsely. He points to our sins and claims that they define us. He points to our lack of righteousness and tries to convince us that this is how God judges us.

But the Comforter disagrees. Satan is wrong. So the Spirit convicts him concerning judgment. The ruler of this world is judged because that all he speaks is lies. For in truth God sees us robed in Christ's righteousness, not our own. God forgives our sins for Christ's sake. And God has judged the father of lies and the murderer of souls. He has judged him and thrown him out. The judgment of Satan against us cannot stand. He stands judged himself.

God is right about sin. Left to ourselves, we are bound by it and can't set ourselves free. We are blinded by it and can't see things as they are. Only Christ can take away our sin by suffering for us so that we are forgiven and set free.

God is right about righteousness. Only the doing and dying of Christ can stand before the Throne of Judgment as pure unadulterated righteousness. This is unseen by the world and therefore despised. But being clothed in Christ's righteousness through Holy Baptism as we are makes us holier than a whole parade of the best, of the noblest, and of the most revered works that the world could ever produce.

God is right about judgment. It doesn't matter about how the world sees us or judges us because God is our Judge. He has already brought us out of judgment into Christ's grace in which we stand. It doesn't matter how the devil slanders us. He stands condemned. The blood of Christ washes away all our sins and silences our accuser. Of what sin can he accuse you? Not one! Christ has borne them all away.

This is the Holy Spirit's true and lasting comfort for us. All that the Father and the Son have is declared to us. The Comforter tells you this truth that is to your advantage: you are forgiven and truly righteous for Christ's sake. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠