

Sermon for Easter 5 (Cantate) Sunday – John 16:5-15

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

After the Last Supper, Jesus preached to His disciples. He is about to depart and He wants them to have comfort. He is about to die and leave them alone in a world filled with danger and distress, hostility, persecution, and death, all against them for His sake. They will be excommunicated and those who kill them will believe that they are serving God. As we can imagine, this is very difficult and frightening to hear, and He has even more to say which they cannot bear now! They are about to lose their Lord and be left in misery and distress.

Yet Christ comforts them. In place of His departure, He promises to send the Holy Spirit, who will comfort and strengthen their hearts. He will make them citizens of His kingdom. The Holy Spirit will indeed accomplish much in the world through them.

But it wasn't easy. The task before the apostles was almost impossibly difficult. Eleven uneducated men of the people would go out to all nations and preach the resurrection of Christ. They would go to skeptical Greeks, self-confident Romans, and even their own fellow countrymen who despised everything they stood for. They would preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ which even they found hard to understand.

It isn't surprising that they felt helpless when faced with this task, but Jesus promised them a helper who would make it possible. He promised them the Holy Spirit, who would guide them to the truth. How? He would remind them of what Jesus said and did. He would even help them to use the right words to express it.

The Spirit of truth made the impossible possible. We can thank Him for the picture of Christ given to us through the evangelists in the Gospels, a picture that gives us all the essentials we need to know. The Spirit led the apostles, just as the Spirit still leads the church today about everything that God has done in Christ.

And we still need the Holy Spirit. Don't we also face skeptical, self-confident, and hate-filled people today? It would be brash of us to think that we could face them with our own knowledge and reason. So the power of the Holy Spirit still works in us today. Luther sums it up well: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." And Jesus summarizes the Spirit's work in three short points that we encounter in today's Gospel. He teaches us the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgement.

First, the Spirit convinces us of our sin, teaches us right from wrong, and alerts us to our gravest error – when unbelief comes upon us. When we think our sins are not really that bad, He convicts us that our deeds done in darkness are in fact shameful. And

if we're honest, our hearts are still filled with guilt. As Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Second, the Spirit witnesses about true righteousness that comes from God, the righteousness that Christ acquired for us on the cross and gives us after He completed His work and returned to the Father. And finally, the Spirit witnesses to the truth about the fate that Christ's death sealed for the prince of darkness and for all our sins. In our times and in sharply furious wrath and hatred against Christ, the devil desires and strives to abolish and root out Christianity completely.

But when the devil and his kingdom were conquered by Christ, they must yield to Him. Even though we Christians continue to suffer from the devil and the world, God's Word of promise cannot be overthrown, but shall finally be victorious. Christ is Lord over all and has power and might to condemn and punish with eternal hellfire the devil and his angels.

Satan, death, sin, hell, and all their ways have been overcome, judged, and condemned by Christ. The fact that this foolish world still calls damnable sin and selfishness "the good life," gladly exchanges the truth for lies, and fears death, hell, and the devil which have already been destroyed is the great travesty. Why? Because the promise of Genesis 3 is fulfilled: Christ has crushed the serpent's head. Satan has been judged: the verdict of condemnation has been spoken. The only thing still lacking is the execution, that is, when the punishment will be carried out on him on the Last Day. When a thief or murderer has been convicted by a judge and the sentence has been pronounced, he is led away to receive justice. This is the time in which we live—"concerning judgement, the ruler of this world is judged."

Again, this is a judgement, not unlike something we would see in a courtroom setting today. When a judge makes his declaration, whether it be ruling in favor of one party or another, or passing a sentence of penalty against the convicted, his word stands. What he declares comes to be. And how much more so with God! What He declares always comes to be! Jesus said, "... [The Spirit] will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that He will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Yes! A judgement is declared! It is a simultaneous victory over death and the devil as much as it is the fact that we condemned sinners stand in grace and limitless mercy by Christ's suffering and death for us. Forgiveness and eternal life are ours. And the Holy Spirit still is the witness who gives testimony to all this today. Amen.

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