

The Fifth Sunday after Easter (Cantate) – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. John 16:5-15: “Jesus’ Work Is Made Yours by the Spirit’s Work.”
May 6/7, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

Send, we humbly ask You, Almighty God, Your Holy Spirit into our hearts, that He may rule and direct us according to Your will; comfort us in all our temptations and afflictions, defend us from all error, and lead us into all truth, that we, being steadfast in the faith, may increase in love, and in all good works, and in the end obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 123)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

[Jesus said:] “But now I am going to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. / “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He 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.” (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whose Father willed your salvation from eternity, who won your salvation by His death and resurrection, and whose saving work is brought to you today by the power of the Holy Spirit, dear fellow redeemed:

When Jesus spoke the words of today’s reading, everything was so clouded for His disciples, so unclear. Even though Jesus had plainly told them what was coming, they did not understand. They were filled with sorrow, preoccupied with their own thoughts which were not God’s thoughts. But later, after Jesus died, rose again, and ascended into heaven, they did understand. They were guided into “*all the truth*” by “*the Spirit of truth*.” But how did they know the Spirit was speaking to them? How did they know what was true? And how can we be sure today that we have the truth?

We know very well that the world in which we live does not support the idea of objective truth. Many people consider truth to be relative: “You have your truth, and I have my truth, and

everyone's truth is equally valid." That all sounds very nice until one person's truth is totally opposed to another person's truth. Then both truths cannot be equal. Both truths cannot be valid.

We would think that at least among Christians, we could agree about what is true. But sadly, that is not the case. Even basic questions like, "Is the Bible the Word of God?" or "Did Jesus really rise from the dead?" are not answered the same way by all Christians, and not even by all Lutherans. Some of them believe that the Holy Spirit is working not so much through the Bible, but that He is working directly in our minds and hearts and through our culture to lead us to new truths and new teachings.

What does Jesus have to say about all this? We'll start at the end of today's reading, where Jesus says, *"All that the Father has is Mine."* That is a bold statement! The disciples of Jesus still did not grasp His eternal connection to the Father as His only Son. Earlier in the evening, Philip blurted out, *"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us"* (Joh. 14:8). And Jesus replied, *"Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"* (vv. 9-10).

Jesus was teaching them and us that He is one God with the Father. Everything that God the Father has, the Son has. Jesus listed some of these things as He prayed to His Father that same evening. He said that His Father had given Him *"authority over all flesh"* (Joh. 17:2). He had given Him His words (v. 8), His name (v. 11), His glory (v. 22), and His love (v. 26). These are the gifts that God the Father gave God the Son.

But those gifts did not remain with the Son. They were shared with sinners, including you and me. This happens by the work of the third Person of the Holy Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. But before the Holy Spirit imparts the gifts of God, He must prepare us to receive them. That work of preparation is hard on us, because the Holy Spirit reveals our need for salvation by pointing out our sins, imperfections, and misplaced priorities.

Jesus says that the Holy Spirit comes to *"convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."* The Holy Spirit through the holy Law condemns the world for its rejection of Jesus, for trusting its own ideas about righteousness which are nothing but filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), and for following the desires of the devil who wants us to focus only on ourselves and only on this life.

The Holy Spirit must perform major surgery on us to break our dependence on the pleasures and promises of the world and to cut out the sin embedded deep in our hearts. Most surgery is painful, but its purpose is to bring about healing and strength. A patient can't get better if the root problem is not addressed, if the infection is not eliminated, if the cancer is not removed.

The Holy Spirit shows us through the holy Law how deeply sin has infected us and how dire our situation is. But we don't like to think we are really that bad off. Whatever spiritual weaknesses and problems we have, we think we can fix them. We can avoid the temptations that caused us to fall in the past. We can do better. It's like trying to run on a broken leg.

So we fall into the same old sins, and we fall for new ones too. We are not capable of healing ourselves. If we were doing so well, God the Father would not have sent His Son to take on our flesh, keep the Law for us, and die on the cross to atone for sin. And God the Holy Spirit would not have come first of all to *“convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”*

This is why we confess every week at the beginning of the divine service “that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against [God] by thought, word and deed” (Rite 1, p. 41), that each one of us is “a poor, miserable sinner” (Rite 2, p. 61). That is not very flattering language! And it is completely accurate.

But the Holy Spirit’s work is not only to convict us, not only to reveal our sins. In fact, that is not even His primary work. His main work is to comfort us. Now He does not comfort us by telling us things like, “Everything’s going to work out just the way you want,” or “God loves you just the way you are.” He comforts us by planting the perfect promises of God right in our sinful hearts.

Jesus said, *“He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.”* “The things that are to come” means all that Jesus would accomplish by His death and resurrection. The disciples did not know that by morning, their great Teacher and Lord would be beaten beyond recognition and nailed to a cross. They did not know that this was necessary for the salvation of sinners. And they did not know that on the third day He would rise from the dead in victory.

His saving work is why Jesus said, *“it is to your advantage that I go away.”* His “going away” meant that the work was finished. His work to save you was complete. Because He gave Himself as the sacrificial Lamb on the cross, your sins are all washed away. And because He rose from the dead in triumph, death can no longer overpower you.

You know this and you believe it, because the Holy Spirit has declared it to you through the holy Word of God. Jesus said, *“He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you.”* Here we can see the perfect unity of the Holy Trinity. The Father has given all things to the Son, and the Son has given all things to the Holy Spirit to give to you. The Father’s authority, the Father’s words, the Father’s name, the Father’s glory, the Father’s love—all of it comes to you through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

With the authority bestowed on Him at His resurrection, Jesus commissioned the apostles to go and make disciples of all nations by baptizing them and teaching them all that He had taught them (Mat. 28:18-20). That is how you became a disciple. You were baptized into God’s name by the power of His Word and were brought into His holy family. Everything Jesus did for you became yours. You were given a share of His glory and became a recipient of the divine love that the Father has for His Son, because the Holy Spirit made you a member of Jesus’ holy body.

The Holy Spirit continues to bring you the rich blessings of God. The Holy Spirit does all His work through the Word, and always through the Word. That is where He is active. If anyone claims to receive a message from the Spirit outside of the Bible, a message that contradicts the Bible, that message is not from God. You have the truth, because you have the pure Word of God.

By the Spirit's work through the Word, you know that you deserve to be punished eternally in hell because of your sins, and you also know that your sins are all forgiven through the blood of God's Son. You know that your best works cannot earn you any favor with God, and you know that by faith in His Son, you now stand perfectly righteous before Him. You know that you have let the devil lead the way far too often and have fallen for his lies again and again, and you know that Jesus has destroyed Satan's evil plans and brought you into His own kingdom of light.

The Spirit of truth has taught you all these things by the Word. None of them are new, and they never go out of style. In three weeks, we will celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the birthday of the Christian Church. We welcome His coming by continuing to hear the Word, read it, meditate on it, and hold it tight as the greatest treasure we have.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

+ + +