

Cantate Domini
2 May, Anno Domini 2021
St. John 16:5-15
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Look at how attentive Christ is to the disciples sadness and fear and how He speaks the purest comfort into their ears. He doesn't ignore their sorrow. He doesn't issue platitudes. He doesn't try to cheer them up. He doesn't turn a cold stoic face to his friends. He teaches. He shows them what is good and necessary. They, of course, wanted Jesus to remain. They thought that would be to their advantage. They knew the hatred of the Jews and wondered if it would fall against them once their Teacher was gone. And, more than anything else, what would it become of all that Jesus had done and preached? Was it all going to just get thrown away?

Jesus knew better. He knew exactly what they needed. He knew the only thing that would actually comfort them and bring them peace and that is exactly what He was going to give them, even though they couldn't understand it in the moment because they were, as we usually are, thinking only of earthly things. "Death is bad so it is bad if our Teacher dies. Suffering and death are always to be avoided at any cost." They were thinking only of themselves. But good for them and for you and me, Jesus was thinking of them too - and you. That is why in that moment He made a promise to them - He promised to send them the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. The ESV calls Him the Helper and that's not wrong but I think it misses the heart of what Jesus is promising His disciples. The disciples don't need help. They need comfort. They will watch Jesus be taken away from them and crucified. They will watch Him ascend out of their sight. They are filled with terror and uncertainty and what lays ahead of them.

Yes, Jesus is going away, but that is exactly what they need. Jesus is going to die for their sins. He is going to accomplish the will of God for all men - that the full weight of God's just judgment against your sin should be taken from you and laid on the Lamb of God so that you could be at peace with God and no longer live in fear of eternal judgment. That is the comfort that Jesus gives in the middle of your darkest and most difficult hours when

your world seems to be collapsing around you and God Himself seems to have left you to simply suffer heartache and loss and fear and confusion. The comfort that Jesus brings is the comfort that no matter how bad it gets, no matter how deep your pain, no matter how weak and insignificant the world may think you are, no matter how far you have fallen, no matter how out of control your life is, no matter how much you lose, you will NEVER need to question whether God loves you and forgives you. You never need to wonder whether He will care for you and provide for you, whether He will vindicate your faith and be faithful to His promises. Jesus goes away to make that certainty iron-clad.

If Jesus doesn't die, if He doesn't go away through the cross to the Father who sent Him, then there is no word of comfort to speak to you because your sins will still stand in judgment over you. The whole comfort of the Comforter is the saving work of Jesus. The whole job of the Spirit is to bring you, to bring the world, to Christ. The Holy Spirit doesn't give you special and new revelations. He points you to the one, all-sufficient revelation of God's love and mercy and forgiveness. But the only one to whom Christ crucified is comforting is the one who is comforted, the one who knows and feels his weakness and brokenness, the one who is burdened by his own unrighteousness, the one who knows that the wisdom and works of the world are nothing but vain, empty, foolish lies that bring death. The comfort is that the absolute chaos that fills the world, the crushing weight of your own guilt - these are not all there is. These things have met their end in the dead Son of God whose Blood empties sin and death of their power to condemn you forever and has overcome the enemies who seek to swallow up and to cast you into the deep dark of hopelessness and despair.

And so the Spirit must convict the world, He must convict you, concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. He must expose the truth that your pride, your anger, your fear, your selfishness, your disinterest in His Word, your unwillingness to pray, all of these things are sin and finally nothing less than a complete rejection of Jesus. You sin because, like Adam and Eve you think there's more to be had, that God hasn't given you every good and perfect thing that you need even when you don't have a penny to your name. Your heart isn't satisfied that God is good. Your heart wants to measure God's goodness by the stuff He gives. You give in to despair and anxiety because you stop measuring God's love by Jesus and the waters of

Holy Baptism and instead try to measure it by how hard or how easy your life in this world is, what you have and don't have.

The Spirit has to show you that your righteousness isn't righteousness at all. Your righteousness is what nailed Jesus to the cross. You cannot make yourself righteous no matter how hard you try. Jesus alone sits at the right hand of God, righteous not simply because of His moral superiority, but because He laid down His life for sinners, because He loved the unlovable ones who hated Him, because He died for those who killed Him, because He offered up His innocence as payment for your guilt. He is the righteous God who rules His kingdom by mercy and forgiveness, not rewards and payments.

The Spirit must expose this world's demonic ruler who cheers us on as we chase after the selfish desires of our heart, who fills our ears with lies about how God helps those who help themselves, who would have us believe that the most loving thing we can do for a person is to sit silently by while he drowns under the delusion that his sin is good. He must expose the world and its ruler for the liars that they are so that you might not be led astray.

All of this the Spirit does so that He can go about the marvelous and truly God-pleasing work of comforting you, of bathing you in the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus who has done everything necessary to save you from sin and death and to bring you to everlasting life. The first and greatest work of the Spirit isn't to help you do better. Instead, it is to bring you to Jesus who has done everything for you, who gives you the glorious dress of His own righteousness in Baptism. This is the true and only comfort there really is. The world can't offer you this. You won't find it within yourself. You will find it only in Jesus and He wants you to have it. That's why Jesus goes away so that the Holy Spirit who comforts and heals might be sent forth and proclaim Jesus' saving work to all people everywhere.

Jesus has gone away to the cross and paid for your sins. You are fully and freely forgiven. He has born the judgment so that you might no longer tremble in sorrow and fear. Look to Jesus. God loves you. May the Holy Spirit pour out the comfort of Jesus to you and scatter the dark clouds of your sorrow.

In the Name of +Jesus.