

Cantate

15 May, Anno Domini 2022

St. John 16:5-15

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

If you have thought to yourself recently “I can’t even tell what is true anymore or who is telling the truth”, you’re not alone. Everyone is working an angle and has an agenda that shapes how they frame things. Information is left out or invented out of whole cloth. The meanings of words are turned upside down. It’s no wonder people throw up their hands and stop seeking truth and just look for someone to tell them what to do. Less and less do people concern themselves with what is true and settle instead for what is expedient and what is easy. The devil is working feverishly to obscure the truth so that his lies may hold sway and we follow them to eternal judgment. This is why modern tries to reject truth all together as something unknowable or at least malleable. This underlies such destructive ideas as “A woman can change and become a man”, “a man can bear children”, “children in the womb aren’t people”. It is increasing popular to completely discard the idea of truth.

But you know that’s an absolutely ludicrous way of thinking. You know that such statements are objectively false and contrary to what is objectively true. It would be like saying “I don’t want to believe that fire is hot and can burn me therefore that must be true because I say so.” Go ahead. Put your hand in the fire and see if your not believing keeps the fire from cooking your flesh. We would be dumbfounded by someone who actually believed such nonsense. Or would we? Aren’t we guilty of this all the time – trying to make our own truth and worship a God of our own making who said only things that we want Him to say? Every day we make up excuses why our gossip, our lies, our anger, our adultery, and our idolatry are okay and aren’t actually evil. But they aren’t. They hurt. They destroy. They condemn.

Repent and sing unto the Lord a new song full of the lyrics of truth that the Holy Spirit has graciously shown you – that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone, that not a single one of even our best works do anything to save us, and that the prince of darkness who holds so much sway in this world has been judged and condemned. This is what Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit into the world to do – to speak the truth that our selfish and self-centered minds couldn’t know or imagine

otherwise. You just heard the words of Jesus “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” It’s important to understand that convict here isn’t really speaking about a legal conviction of guilt. It’s really better understood to mean to refute or oppose an incorrect view and convince of the truth.

That sounds great doesn’t it, because everyone loves the truth, don’t they? I’m sure you know that’s not true. Do you rejoice and thank the officer who pulls you over and gives a ticket for speeding through the neighborhood? Kids, do you rejoice when your parents turn off the radio or television because what you are listening to or watching is trash and glorifying things contrary to God’s Word? Or do you jump out of bed at the opportunity to come to church? Do you take the person out for a celebratory drink who in loving humility pointed out your sin to you and out of concern for you warned you of the great danger your continued sin and unrepentance puts you in?

The only reason the Holy Spirit needs to convict and teach the world these things, and that includes us, is because we don’t know them otherwise. We don’t understand what real sin is unless the Holy Spirit reveals it to us. We don’t know true righteousness unless the Holy Spirit shows us. We don’t really know how to judge things rightly until the Holy Spirit teaches us and shows us. Let’s take a minute and look at each of these three things in turn and compare how the world thinks about them to what the Holy Spirit has revealed.

First, sin. The first things that come to mind when we talk about sin are the things that we do that we shouldn’t – lying, stealing, lusting, coveting – and the things that we should do but don’t – gladly hearing God’s Word and receiving the Sacraments, helping and loving our neighbor, teaching our children the Christian faith at home. And those truly are sins. How do we know these are sins (or as we ask the candidates for confirmation “How do you know you are a sinner”)? We only know because the Ten Commandments have been given to us. That’s why it’s so important for adults and kids to know and learn by heart the Ten Commandments. And while it may not agree with us on the Ten Commandments, the world at least thinks of sin in these terms – things I do or fail to do.

But that isn’t what Jesus says the Holy Spirit will teach. And this is where the world stumbles and is offended by what we preach. The real sin is the failure to believe in Jesus – not just that there was some guy who lived a few thousand years ago by that name, but that He has paid the price for all sin, all the things we do or fail to do. The sin that now condemns is to deny that Jesus is the full and true

revelation of God and that He has made full atonement for our sins. Our nature tells us that sin is something that can and must be overcome by choosing to behave in a better way. **WRONG!** Jesus died on the cross and all sin, whether you believe it or not has been paid for. Not a single sin committed before or after Jesus hasn't been covered by the spilling of His holy, innocent blood. We can't and we don't have to make up for the evil we have done by doing better. Even IF we could do perfect things, they wouldn't be enough to overcome the evil. The true and only sin that remains is the failure to believe that the death of Jesus, and that alone, has paid for sin and opened the gates of heaven to us. It would be like someone handing you a million bucks and you said "No you didn't." The real sin is denying that Jesus did what He did for you. But we and the rest of the world would never know that if it weren't for the gracious teaching of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Scriptures, the inerrant and infallible Word of God

What about righteousness? What is true righteousness and how does a person become righteous? We naturally want to believe that righteousness is simply doing the right thing, making good choices, obeying the Ten Commandments. That makes sense right? We work and try really hard to be the best, kindest, most helpful person we can be and that makes God happy with us. We often hear "As long as you believe something. As long as you try." The Holy Spirit says "WRONG!" Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary, has ascended to the right hand of the Father. There He rules over His spiritual kingdom of grace through the preaching and receiving of the Gospel – the good news that we are righteous in God's sight because of Jesus, because He has given us His righteousness as a gift in the waters of Holy Baptism. We aren't righteous because of anything we do, but because of what Jesus has done for us and bestows upon us. And what greater certainty and cause of joy could there be than to know that you are righteous because God said you are? That's definitely not the way the world thinks. That's why the vast majority of people, even Christians, believe that righteousness is something they earn from God by being good and that you get to heaven by being a good person. But the Holy Spirit teaches you this glorious truth and says "Stop looking at yourself to find righteousness. Look at Jesus. God loves you because Jesus died for you. Period. When God looks at you, drowned in Baptism, eating and drinking the Body and Blood of His Son, all He sees is Jesus and He is well-pleased with Him."

Finally, the Holy Spirit teaches us right judgment. As God's people, you are a royal priesthood talked with judging, discerning, distinguishing between what is holy and what is holy as God the Lord has shown in His Word. The world wholeheartedly believes that its commandments of tolerance, self-enrichment,

sexual freedom, and self-preservation are “right”. It believes that God is satisfied with the virtuous lives that we define for ourselves. The world would have you indulge your inner desires because you deserve it and your desires are yours and can’t be bad. But nothing could be further from the truth, and thankfully the Holy Spirit has taught us and revealed what is truly right.

By teaching us what true sin is and what true righteousness is, the Holy Spirit also teaches us to judge and evaluate things God’s way, the right way, to know what is actually right and wrong in the eyes of God, not just what we want to believe what is right and wrong. Human reason has its place down here figuring out how to build things, how to govern, how to keep your body healthy. But in the cross of Jesus, the Holy Spirit shows us that human wisdom is absolute foolishness and ignorance when it comes to matters of eternal life and salvation. Human reason has it all backwards. As Dr. Luther put it “Everything that is born of man and is not born from above, must be rooted out and crucified, so that no one may boast of it and depend upon it.” What the devil would tell you is good and holy and pious and that make God happy– false works that God never asked for or commanded – are nothing but sin and distractions from that which God has said is truly good and holy and pious – to believe in Jesus and His righteousness, that your guilt has been taken away from you and your sins are no longer counted against you. In the cross of Jesus, the devil has been judged and shown to be a liar, a manipulator, and a murderer. What is good is repentance, faith, hearing God’s Word, loving your neighbor as yourself, humility, clinging to the promises of Baptism, hungering for the Body and Blood of Christ.

But the devil has been judged and defeated. You have been set free. You are righteous. Jesus died and Jesus lives. He has sent out His Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel and the Sacraments and that same Holy Spirit through that same Gospel and those same Sacraments has led you into all truth, the truth that is and will always be Jesus Christ crucified, died, buried, risen, and now sitting at the right hand of God the Father almighty. May that same Spirit keep us in this truth by His mercy and grace and lead others to the same.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.