

5th Sunday of Easter (Cantate): May 19, 2019

“Songs for the Saints”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our text is the Epistle Lesson, James 1, especially these words, “**James 1:16-17.**”

The Latin moniker for the 5th Sunday of Easter is Cantate. Is the word for sing, and comes from Psalm 98, “*Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!*”¹ This is an important concept, as we are all well aware of the power of music. It can be used to illicit all kinds of emotions. This past Tuesday, the 5-12 grade bands took the community of Grinnell through a myriad of places, cultures, and emotional highs and lows. How many preset slots do you use on your radio stations in your vehicle? How many different playlists do you have on your various devices, or how many records, cds, cassette tapes, or 8-tracks, do you still have? Do you listen to certain ones based your particular mood? Do you listen to others if you are wanting to change your mood?

Music is important, and this day, Cantate, is the same word we use when we speak of canticles—God’s word set to music. Luther had a very high place for music. He rightly said, “*Music is an outstanding gift of God and next to theology. I would not want to give up my slight knowledge of music for a great consideration. And youth should be taught this art: for it makes fine, skillful people...I am not satisfied with him who despises music, as all fanatics do; for music is an endowment and a gift of God, not a gift of men...I place music next to theology and give it the highest praise.*”

This is a great pretext for our hearing from James, the brother of our Lord, “***Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.***”² Literally – stop deceiving yourselves. There is God and there is not God. This is true in all things, so also with the gift of music. Who gets the glory? The source of music or the instrument? No one would walk back to the organ after worship this morning and say, “Great job organ. You played beautiful music today.” So also with everything man does. As instruments of His mercy and grace, how absurd to take credit and glory for the many things we do, rather than giving glory and thanks to God.

¹ Psalm 98:1

² James 1:16

“Stop deceiving yourselves,” James says, “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*”³ Jesus reminds the rich young man, “*There is only one who is good.*”⁴ The utter corruption of man in sin is so deep God caused Moses to record for our remembrance, “*The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*”⁵

If man’s sinful heart is wicked and every intention is evil continually, how can one claim to bring a gift to God that has any worth at all? The words of James are placed very carefully. It is the gift and the act of giving that come from God. The sinful nature is selfish. It seeks to be God, and demands that others render their service to please myself. When this doesn’t happen, we get hurt and appalled. We stand in the place of God, and live like popular musicians in the vein of King Nebuchadnezzar, “*You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.*”⁶

With God, there is no variation or shadow. There is no change. He is “*the same yesterday and today and forever.*”⁷ Wickedness comes from our heart, perfect innocence comes from God. How sad we often take the many gifts from above and pervert them for our own purposes. The central gift, the gift from which all other gifts find their fulfillment is explained, “*Of [God’s] own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*”⁸

While we were lost in sin, vile rejecters of God, and loathsome perverters of His Word, God loved us with such an everlasting love that He sent His Son. Jesus Christ, took on servant’s form. He was born of flesh and blood. The perfect giver gave the perfect gift—Jesus lived a perfect life under the Law. He who is good, He who is truth, bore the wrath of God against the deepness of rejection to His gifts of innocence and life.

³ James 1:17

⁴ Matthew 19:17

⁵ Genesis 6:5

⁶ Daniel 3:4–6

⁷ Hebrews 13:8

⁸ James 1:18

When John's disciples came asking Jesus if He was THE One, He said, "***It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'***"⁹ In other words, "Since the beginning, I have given you the words to sing. I have given you the tunes to sing. I have created and given a wonderful symphony of music and words together. These are recorded for you in the pages of My Holy Word. Yet, you continually turn to your own words. You look to your own songs. You seek truth from within yourself."

Brothers and sisters, in God's perfectly orchestrated plan of salvation, "***God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.***"¹⁰ Just how important is music to God? He has 150 songs written that clearly give glory to Him! I know many often speak them; rather than sing them, but that is simply because we are out of practice. Our Lord drew comfort from these hymns at some of His most darkest moments – after the institution of the Lord's Supper, "***When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.***"¹¹ – Also from the cross, hanging in agony, bearing the weight of God's wrath for your sin, He sang, "***Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?***"¹² in Aramaic and Hebrew, it rhymes and has verse and meter.

Sin brings death. God's Word of truth brings life. His defeat of death is for you. A firstfruits of His creatures. Jesus is the best of the harvest, and He grafts you to Himself. Through the Word, joined to water a masterpiece is known, "***a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: 'He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.'***"¹³

Christ is given in baptism. A regenerated heart is given in baptism. All good thoughts, words, works, done through you flow from the fountain and source of all good, the True giver of gifts. As you are washed, a new instrument is placed into His orchestra.

⁹ Matthew 11:16–17

¹⁰ John 3:17

¹¹ Matthew 26:30

¹² Matthew 27:46

¹³ Luther's Small Catechism, Baptism – 3rd Part

This changes the music you play, “***Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.***”¹⁴ James clears the way for a proper reception of the saving Word of God. The Word of God is to be received. One who continually talks, makes a bad hearer. One who must always have their mouth open, cannot have their ears open. Quick to hear and slow to speak – that is to say, “Since you have received the gracious adoption as children of God by the Word of God, and the Word brings spirit and life, making children and heirs of God, live that way. Do not despise the Word, do not neglect it’s preaching; rather be diligent to hear it and learn it gladly. As you do, be slow to anger.”

Now that bears some time. When the sinful nature hears of sin and wrong doing, the first reaction is dismay, and often anger – “I’m hurt, and offended, and hurt. I am not a sinner...I would never...Who are you to judge me?...What gives you the right?...What about so and so, they are worse.” These are deceptive tricks of the Old Adam. While we are children of God, we still live with the sinful flesh, and to you is charged also, “***Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.***”¹⁵

God has not dropped His face toward you, “***No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.***”¹⁶ Often it is more than you can handle, so that you only have one place to turn – The Giver of every perfect gift. The only way out is Jesus and His Word. You will sin. You will fall. You will turn away at times. The Holy Spirit who was given to you, the New Adam, the new creature, the new life given to you in baptism brings you to the Word. He calls, gathers, enlightens (in the gathering), sanctifies, and keeps together.

One of the greatest ways this is done is by singing. Why do I chant and sing so much? Because it is easier to hear and memorize. It is easier to recall the words. It serves the Gospel. How many lines from my sermons can you remember word for word? How many long Bible passages can you recall and recite word for word?

Now, how many hymns can you sing? How many canticles can you sing in the liturgy

¹⁴ James 1:19–20

¹⁵ Genesis 4:6–7

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:13

without opening the hymnal? Do you know who really appreciates that? The shut-ins, those whose eyesight is failing, parents who are trying to participate and wrestle with kids at the same time, and kids who can't yet read.

While the Old Adam would rather get angry and speak at God, because it is anxious and troubled by many things, the New Adam hears a different tune. It knows “***but one thing is necessary...the good portion, which will not be taken away.***”¹⁷

Thus James concludes this morning, “***Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.***”¹⁸ The Child of God is always ready to hear a lot, not to talk a lot, or quick to flare up in anger. The word implanted is important because it calls to mind an ongoing action. As the angry sinful nature is constantly with you, hounding you after baptism, the Word needs to be heard again and again and again and again. When the Word is spoken, the devil has to be quiet. In good concert etiquette, no one may talk when the instrument is being played. While the conductor has His hands up, the instruments play and the rest of the world sits in quiet anticipation.

The Hands have been nailed up. The instruments of God are played. You are saved. Receive the Word which is able to save your souls. (Raise hand) – “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” “***The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.***”¹⁹ Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

¹⁷ Luke 10:41–42

¹⁸ James 1:21

¹⁹ Numbers 6:24–26

Prayer of the Church
Fifth Sunday of Easter (Cantate)
19 May 2019

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Almighty and eternal God, worthy to be held in reverence by all people everywhere, we give You humble and sincere thanks for the innumerable blessings that You have bestowed on us without any merit or worthiness on our part. We praise You especially for preserving for us Your saving Word and the Holy Sacraments, and we give you thanks for the gift of music. Grant and preserve to Your Holy Church throughout the world purity of doctrine, and provide faithful pastors to preach Your Word with power. Help all who hear the Word rightly to understand and truly to believe it. Send laborers into Your harvest, and open the door of faith to those who do not know You. We give thanks with the congregations of *Trinity, Chertian and Trinity, State Center*, as they prepare to receive *Nathan and Robert*. May they work together to glorify Your Name among the people they live. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, in mercy bring to repentance the enemies of Your Church, and grant them amendment of life. Protect and defend Your Church in all tribulation and danger, and sustain with Your Spirit our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who experience persecution. Strengthen us and all fellow Christians to set our hope fully on the grace revealed in Christ, and help us to fight the good fight of faith, that in the end, we may receive the salvation of our souls. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, bestow Your grace on all nations of the earth. Bless especially our country, its inhabitants and all who are in authority. Let Your glory dwell in our land, that mercy and truth, righteousness and peace may abound in all places. Bless also all who serve in our armed forces, that they may serve with integrity and honor. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate Lord, graciously defend us from all calamity by fire and water, from war and pestilence, from scarcity and famine, and from every other evil. Protect and prosper all who labor in their rightful callings, and let all useful arts flourish among us. Be the God and Father of the lonely and the forsaken, the helper of the sick and needy, the comforter of the distressed and those who sorrow. Look with mercy especially upon those who have requested our prayers, *[including Dennis, Amber, Larry, Greg and those we name in our hearts,]* that they may ever cling to Jesus as their sure and certain hope. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, our times are in Your hands. Look with favor, we pray, on Your servants *Lillian, Helen, Dale, and Brian* whom You have granted another year of earthly life. Grant that *they* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *their* trust in Your goodness all the days of *their* life; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, maker of heaven and earth and giver of life, we thank You for all the mercies You granted *Philip* during his earthly life, especially for calling him to faith in Jesus Christ. Comfort the survivors who mourn his death with the hope of the glorious resurrection and a joyful reunion in heaven. Keep us mindful that we are mortal so that we will ever be prepared to die in the faith and finally receive the glory promised to all who trust in your beloved Son. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant Your Holy Spirit to those who come to the Lord's table this day, that they may receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ in sincere repentance and firm faith and to their abundant blessing. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father, as we are strangers and pilgrims on earth, help us by true faith and a godly life to prepare for the world to come, doing the work You have given us to do while it is day, before the night comes when no one can work. And when our last hour comes, support us by Your power and receive us into Your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**