

Cantate (5th Sunday of Easter): May 15, 2022

“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. It 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. 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 on 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 clavinoia after the Divine Service this morning and say, “Great job clavinoia. 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.

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

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.

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.

⁹ Matthew 11:16–17

¹⁰ John 3:17

¹¹ Matthew 26:30

¹² Matthew 27:46

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.

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."

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

¹⁴ James 1:19–20

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 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 This is why we must sing, and sing hymns that are not just fun, or easy, sound good. They must actually say something. I know sometimes the tunes might be difficult, or not familiar. We can argue about what to sing and I might not always hit all of your favorites. You are free to sing through your hymnals at home.

¹⁵ Genesis 4:6–7

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:13

¹⁷ Luke 10:41–42

We have often talked about hymns. When I choose hymns, I do it with your best interests in mind. I am not aiming to take away your favorite hymns; rather, I am hoping to add your favorites list. Some that are more difficult are chosen precisely because of the words they sing, and we need to bring those back. The more we sing good theology, the better we will be prepared for the struggles in life. We will be strengthened and quicker recall timeless truths. We will easily recall not just mode changers, but hope-filled, everlasting peace in the midst of sin, death, and the devil.

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!

¹⁸ James 1:21

¹⁹ Numbers 6:24–26

Prayer of the Church
Fifth Sunday of Easter (Cantate): 15 May 2022

Heavenly Father, You are our strength and song, and Your dear Son has become our salvation. Create and sustain true faith in us, that we may trust and not be afraid of anything in heaven and on earth, save You alone. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, every good and perfect gift is from above. Though we are not worthy of them, You have graciously rained down on us both spiritual and physical gifts. Enlighten our minds, that we would not be deceived by the lies of the world and boast of our self-sufficiency, but recognize these good gifts and receive them with thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, through Your Son's death and resurrection You revealed Your righteousness in the sight of the nations. Send us faithful preachers, that the nations who still dwell in darkness might hear of Jesus' righteousness and be saved. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have enjoined us to be slow to wrath, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Create in us kind and loving hearts, that we may love our neighbors and help and support them in every physical need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You hold all people accountable for the responsibilities You have given them. O Lord, bless our president, our governor, the Congress and legislature, and all judges and magistrates. Guide them to serve according to Your will and for the common good of all. Raise up those with heroic virtue who will defend our liberty. Protect those who defend us in the armed forces, even as You give peace to the nations. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Evonne, Richard, and Susan*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Major, Denise, Helen, Lilly, Dale, and Isaac* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, hear the prayers of intercession we offer in the unity of Your Holy Spirit, our advocate and comforter. Deliver the sick and suffering according to Your will, give peace to the lonely and downtrodden, give strength to the recovering, and comfort to the dying, especially *Marvin, Ruth, Pam, Zoey, Ellie, John, David, Tricia, Greg, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty), and those we name in our hearts*. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have given us both bread for the body and Christ, the bread of life. Prepare us now to receive with faith and thanksgiving His flesh for the life of the world and His blood that cleanses us from all sin. Unite us that we may believe and confess one faith, and bring us to that day when we shall be one people together at the table of our Lord. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, through Your Son You promised Your Holy Spirit, who would convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. Enlighten our hearts so that we would confess our sins, obtain everlasting righteousness through faith in Christ, and through every trial and temptation, abide in the consolation that Christ is Lord over the devil, death and all things, and that He will graciously deliver us from all affliction to make us partakers of eternal salvation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**