

Cantate (Fifth Sunday of Easter): May 2, 2021**“Spirit of Truth”**

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

Perhaps in no other place of Holy Scripture is the mission of the Holy Spirit laid out more clearly than in John 16. As Jesus is gathered in the upper room with His disciples on the night of His betrayal, He opens before them the very work of the Spirit; and this is all for their comfort. You see, Jesus uses a special term for the Third Person of the Trinity—Paraclete; often translated as helper, comforter, or even counselor. The Holy Spirit is the counselor to the Church. There is a deep intimacy that God has with His people. In the tender mercy and loving kindness of our God, He is not a God of compulsion; He is a God of counsel.

Jesus instructs, “*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*”¹ The Greek word for *truth* literally means un-hiddenness. It is a revelation of covered things. Truth occurs when what has been hidden is no longer so. Thus, Jesus says the Holy Spirit, “*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.*”²

“*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,*”³ Jesus says. For Jesus to be going back to the One who sent Him, means that He has to die. There is no second guessing what is going to happen, death is imminent. This news that has sparked anger and outrage in the disciples at other times, has here uncovered the real problem—sorrow.

This isn’t quite too easily to see linguistically in English, but this sorrow connects back to Eve. God gave wise counsel as to what was good, right, and salutary, and Eve wouldn’t hear it.

¹ John 16:13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

² John 16:13–15

³ John 16:5–6

From the mouth of her husband, the words of the first preacher, were not enough. Satan's words were much more enticing. They seemed to be better counsel, because they were told to hold the promise to make one truly wise; as wise as God Himself. Adam had only the Words of God upon which to lean, but the Devil seemed to have more. There was a beautiful fruit.

The beautiful gifts of God were twisted and interestingly woven together, "You see Eve. Why have just words, when you can have everything behind door number two?" In the first episode of Let's Make a Deal, Eve was left with two opposing counsels—simple words, or words with something shiny attached to it.

Adam couldn't compete, or so he thought; and so, what does he do? He remains silent. Rather than speaking the clear words of God, which he himself had heard, he says nothing and allows Eve to continue in deception.

Their disobedience, their failing to trust in the words of God, their seeking to add to God's Word because it just wasn't enough, causes sorrow. Through Adam and Eve, Satan gained a foothold in this world. He didn't do it on his own power. He had to go through the steward of God's creation.

Adam was given good counsel and false counsel, and His choice affects us all. Through mankind, sin not only entered into the world—it is also through man that sin spreads in the world. Actions have consequences. Adam and Eve had the ability to know right and wrong, but no longer had the ability to carry it out. Sin would affect all of creation, "***For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.***"⁴

This is the sorrow Jesus talks about, "***The wages of sin is death.***"⁵ Man must die. The Son must die. Jesus is the Word, the eternal Word of God, who has become flesh, one of Adam. He lowers Himself to be one of His creation. He humbles Himself to not just be a man, but to die. Not just to die in peace, but to die on the cross.

⁴ Romans 8:20–21

⁵ Romans 6:23

On the cross, sin is exposed for its true ugliness. For all the world to see, the wickedness of the devil is revealed. Here hangs the fruit of the tree to make one wise. Here is the fruit that is pleasing to the eye. Here is the consequence of failing to trust in the simple words of God. Here is the flashy and fanciness that man has added to the Word of God.

But here is the uncovering, the truth, the revealing, Jesus says, “***I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away.***”⁶ The Greek word for advantage is literally to bring together, or bind together. Jesus must leave. He must die and rise and ascend, so that, we, the Church, may be bound together. As false counsel was followed to give Satan a foothold in the world, God has now reversed it. God, through Jesus, has gained a foothold in this world. Mankind is redeemed, payment for sin is made.

It is within this foothold that God works, and this is precisely what the Holy Spirit will do. It has been said that the Church, or certain denominations, like Lutherans, seek to limit the work of the Spirit. There remains, even today, many false understandings of the Holy Spirit, “If God can do anything, why can’t the Holy Spirit still...” or, “It can’t just be one set of teachings that is right. The Holy Spirit can work through any means He wants. He doesn’t just have to work through word and sacraments.” People still wait for special revelations from the Holy Spirit apart from God’s Word, and get worked up into frenzies, falling over and speaking incoherently.

I’m not saying there is not A spirit at work in those cases, but we do need to heed the voice of John, the same hand which was given to write our Gospel lesson, “***Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.***”

⁶ John 16:7

They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.⁷

Yes, mankind doesn't limit God, God limits Himself for us. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to the Apostles' in a special way. The first thing the Holy Spirit does through Peter is glorify Jesus, by preaching Christ and Him crucified. We learn that the Church after Pentecost, "***devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.***"⁸ The Holy Spirit used God's simple word to bind the people of God together.

This is the mission of the Spirit. We confess, "*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.*"⁹

There is no more guesswork. For those willing to hear the counsel and words of Jesus, He uncovers for us, precisely what the work of the Holy Spirit is, "***[The Holy Spirit] 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.***"¹⁰

The Holy Spirit will convict, which the Greek word means to prove, to make clear. The only way to the Father is by believing in Jesus. There is no two ways about it. Either Jesus' death has saved you, or it hasn't. Either He has redeemed you fully, or He hasn't, leaving the work to you.

⁷ 1 John 4:1–6

⁸ Acts 2:42

⁹ Luther's Small Catechism, Third Article

¹⁰ John 16:8–11

Either He justifies you, the sinner, or you justify yourself, earn your own way, and God must then grant you a seat at the table. It is either His works or yours.

The Holy Spirit uncovers and exposes the chief and fountainhead of all sins. In what does man place his hope of salvation? There are your works, of course. You do many good things. You are nice sometimes. You read your Bible and love your neighbors when it's convenient; maybe even sometimes when it's not. But, you know you aren't perfect. You wouldn't be here if you were, unless you lied during confession. Your sinful nature rears its ugly head, and like me, like Adam, God's simple word just isn't enough. The government makes me sad; my pastor makes me mad; my teachers make me glum; and my parents are so dumb. My life is more important and worth more than yours. God's ideas of marriage and sexuality are archaic and outdated, my neighbor has better stuff, and you will never believe what so-and-so did today!

Then there is Christ's work. The truly innocent one, who lived perfectly. He committed no wrong, and was marred beyond the resemblance of a human being. He was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The Holy Spirit uncovers our sin, so that we see rightly the true depth of the gift of God in Christ Jesus for us. This is righteousness. Jesus has died, risen, and ascended to the Father. Jesus, true God and true man, sits at the right hand of God. He has shed His blood, brought the blood of the atonement behind the curtain and poured it upon the altar for you. It is not your righteousness that is required, it is His. He has died for you, in your place, and He gives you His own righteousness.

The Holy Spirit uses simple means, Word, water, bread and wine to gather and enlighten His people. Here the truth is uncovered and He exposes you for what you are and the cross for what it is. The ruler of this world is judged. The deed is done. Salvation is won. With water and word, the Church, you, are bound together. Brought into the presence of the Father, you join together, like children, in hearing the simple words of God and eating at the family table.

The world isn't silent. There are constant enticements to forget the simple words of God. They even look fancy and claim to make you wise. For this very reason, the Church must continue to speak, ***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”***

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”¹¹

God’s counsel continues, there must be ongoing catechesis, constant learning and hearing the Word of God. God does not force anyone to be in His kingdom; nor can you compel others to be here. The Holy Spirit can use you, work through you, to counsel others to the Word of God, uncovering the truth of their sin, their need for a savior, AND how Jesus is that righteousness; He is their Savior.

The Holy Spirit has limited Himself to bind us together. Under God’s unchanging simple word and unchanging clear Sacraments, we are joined together as brothers and sisters in Christ, ***“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 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.”***¹² The blood of Christ is shed for you, thus we sing, ***“Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”***¹³

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

¹¹ Hebrews 10:23–25

¹² James 1:16–17

¹³ Isaiah 12:5–6

Prayer of the Church—Responsive Form
Fifth Sunday of Easter (Cantate)
2 May 2021

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Gracious Lord, You have revealed Your righteousness in the sight of the nations: Christ Jesus, Your holy arm. By His death and resurrection, You have worked salvation. Strengthen the song of Your Church. Give skill to musicians and poets, and give boldness to Your congregation in this and every place to sing the eternally new song of Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Holy One of Israel, cause Your Spirit of truth to reign in the Church, that what Christ has won for us would be declared joyfully and faithfully to sinners. Preserve our pastors, missionaries and all who serve with Your Word. Increase among us thankfulness for Your compassion, for You are great in our midst. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father of lights, every good and perfect gift comes down from You. By Your Spirit, put away from our families and communities every hasty or harsh word, together with all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and instead give us patience and humility toward our neighbors. Since You have brought us forth by the Word of Your truth, so let us speak truthfully with one another in meekness as beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, Your Son acknowledged Satan as ruler of this world and its ways, yet one whose reign is judged and whose time is short. Beat back his lies and deadly work, that the order of Your creation may be seen. Give us good government and leaders who are both honest and faithful. Even so, let us look eagerly for Your Son's return, and let that be quickly. 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 *Ellie, Sue, and Isabelle* 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.**

Comfort, O God, with Your Holy Spirit all who are in trouble, want, sickness, physical or mental anguish, peril of death, or any other adversity. Hear our prayers [*especially for Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Floyd Doughty*] and for all those we name in our hearts, that among the many changes of this world their hearts may be fixed where true joys are found. Grant healing, in accordance with Your good and gracious will, and strengthen them in faith, that they may persevere until You grant them healing and wholeness in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, send Your Holy Spirit upon Your faithful people, that convicted of their sin they may also be convinced that the righteousness of Christ is theirs, and in such repentance and faith receive the things of Christ declared in this Supper: His holy body and precious blood for the forgiveness of sins. Unite us by Your Spirit of truth in faith and confession, and comfort us with the knowledge that this world's prince is judged. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, through Your Son You promised Your Holy Spirit, who would convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. Enlighten our hearts so that we 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.**