

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Fifth Sunday of Easter [Cantate] (2021)

The Necessity of Christ's Departure

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“But 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. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he 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.” (John 16:5–11, ESV)

Today is Cantate Sunday which derives its name from the summons of the Introit, to: *“Sing to the Lord a new Song.”* But if we are to sing a new song, we must first hear the music and read its words, it is difficult to sing a song we do not know. Therefore, this morning, let us listen to the song of *the Necessity of Christ's Departure*.

In the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus says to His apostles ***“if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” (John 16:7, ESV)*** The Helper is the Holy Spirit who comforts us by opening our hearts and minds to the truth of God's Word. That truth which speaks of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Most people, following their corrupted nature, seek comfort in lies. Lies which seek after the false pleasures of the world rather than the true treasure of God's Word, the blessed Gospel of glory. They seek after the lies of adultery, drugs, alcohol, homosexuality, and all those other Satanic lies that feed one's corrupted desires and needs. But true lasting comfort is much deeper than human feelings. True lasting comfort is a permanent comfort which comes only from God. It is a comfort that knows this is the way God desires life to be. But this is not a comfort we can find on our own. It must come from God. It is only given by the Holy Spirit who comes to us giving us the gift of faith to believe in what Christ has done for us on the Altar of the Cross, and thereby makes it our own. He opens our hearts to the truth of Christ bringing Him into our lives, giving us the only true comfort needed for living.

The Holy Spirit does not speak according to the world. The world speaks of what it knows through observation. Oh, the world's wisdom is impressive, but it is not all-knowing. It is limited to matters of the world. But a Christians worldly wisdom is no more impressive. When it comes to Christians and heathens, neither has any more common sense than the other. Being successful in the practical things of worldly living, such as making money, building a successful business, gaining an education, and so forth, these are not limited just to those who believe in Christ. No, you don't have to be a Christian to be successful according to worldly standards. Thus, those people who attend church in the hope of discovering the secrets of prosperity found in the message of the speaker, may well find them, but they won't find the true Church. Instead, they will find a counterfeit church, one that has pulled the world into itself imitating the standards of the world. The world loves these churches. But the Holy Spirit, who brings us the truth, reminds us of what Jesus said regarding such churches. He said, ***“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:19, ESV)*** It is good to be hated by the world.

The Church is the pillar which God builds upon the foundation of His truth. The Church is born by the power of the Spirit of truth. One of the truths upon which the Church is built is the truth our Lord Jesus teaches us in today's Gospel Reading. It is the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgment. Our Lord Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He will show that God is right, and the world is wrong about these matters.

Our Lord teaches that what the world calls sin is not sin, what the world calls righteousness is not righteousness, and what the world calls judgment is not judgment. Rather, what God calls sin is sin, what God calls righteousness is righteousness, and what God calls judgment is judgment.

What does the world call sin? The world calls sin whatever offends them because their corrupt consciences have made the world their god. But the Holy Spirit contradicts their conscience, and He says to them, ***"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them."*** (Romans 1:18–19, *ESV*) Turning to the Christian, He reveals to them that they are justified by faith alone, revealing to them that Jesus took away all their sin on the Altar of the Cross and thereby they are forgiven, freely, by God's merciful grace. This is the heart of the Christian faith. It is revealed by the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus is speaking of when He says, ***"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."*** (John 16:14, *ESV*) The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. The very heart of Christianity is a contradiction of worldly ways. You cannot be a Christian and agree with the world.

When the world follows its understanding of truth, it doesn't recognize Christian truth as truth. All the other religions of the world are fundamentally different than Christianity. Christianity is built on faith in the merited grace of Christ for all men, all other religions are based on the supposed merited good works of men. Jesus says sinners are those who, ***"do not believe in me;"*** (John 16:9, *ESV*) This is the sin that makes you guilty of all sins. Unbelief is the source of all evil. But the world doesn't recognize this sin. Why, they ask, should faith in Jesus Christ make any difference? Right is still right. Wrong is still wrong. Isn't it enough to live according to the Ten Commandments (which most of the world fails to do)? To the contrary, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin because they do not believe in Him.

Thus, sin isn't simply a matter of outward disobedience to the Ten Commandments, rather, it's the total corruption of our nature. Sinners are bound by sin. They cannot free themselves. They are blinded by sin, living in a sin-filled world. Only by Christ taking their sin away, suffering and dying for their sins, can sinners be forgiven and set free from the chains of sin. We believe this because the Holy Spirit has given us the gift of faith. But the world sees Christ as nothing more than a lawgiver, a great prophet, or a moral teacher. Not knowing sin, they don't know that faith in Christ is the only hope for the sinner.

But we must ask, "How can the world know Christ when it teaches a bloodless religion?" The world cannot understand the necessity for God to become man. The world cannot understand the necessity for God to die. The world cannot understand the need of a Savior to give His life for ours. Whatever trouble sin might cause, surely man has the power to overcome it. But the Holy Spirit disagrees. He says that sin is too deep for our understanding. It is too strong for us to conquer. The evil that lives within the heart of man is a corruption for which we have no man-made solution. To eradicate this evil required nothing less than the sacrifice of the Son of God who became flesh and gave His life upon the Altar of the Cross. His death brought man eternal life. His death destroyed the power of sin, that power which controls our lives. Thus, Jesus is not an option for sinners. He is a necessity. To reject Jesus in unbelief is to continue to be enslaved

to sin, to trust in sin, to embrace the very evil that enslaves man. The world is wrong regarding what it says about sin.

For that reason, the world is also wrong in what it says about righteousness. Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world of its understanding of righteousness. Since the world cannot understand sin, it also cannot understand righteousness. Righteousness is the opposite of sin.

When the world makes sin less than sin, it simultaneously makes righteousness less than righteousness. In lessening sin the world believes it does not need a Savior. It does not need One who fulfills the Law in their place, gaining thereby true righteousness for them. Denying their sin, the world makes God a liar. But Scripture is clear, no man is without sin. St. John tells us, ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us [and] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:8, 10, ESV)*** Furthermore, there is no neutral ground between sin and righteousness. Jesus says because of their unbelief the Holy Spirit will convict the world of righteousness because He must go to the Father, and we will see Him no longer. Jesus offers a righteousness which we cannot see, but the world desires a righteousness it can see, it can measure, and it can show off before others.

Trying to corrupt true righteousness Satan points to self-righteousness. But self-righteousness is a lie. Yet the world, which doesn't have the righteousness of Christ that is received by faith, must constantly compare itself to others to see if they are more righteous. This is the essence of all worldly religions. For them, righteousness is something which can be measured, it is what others can see. It is counting points, earning credit, gaining merit, and winning recognition from the world. But Jesus says of such people, ***“When you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:2–4, ESV)***

The world is wrong about righteousness. True righteousness is not something you can see or measure or display before others. True, there is a righteousness revealed in the Law, a righteousness that sets the standard for man's moral being and actions, a righteousness that demands absolute conformity and is subject to God's wrath. But God does not see believers in their righteousness, rather, He sees believers robed in the righteousness of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Righteousness is not something that is ours, it is alien to us and comes from outside of man. Ours is a righteousness provided by the vicarious satisfaction of Christ and it is offered in the Gospel. True righteousness consists of God declaring the sinner righteous, forgiving their sin by His grace and for the sake of His Son's righteousness. Thus, true righteousness comes by faith in the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake. St. Paul affirms this in his letter to the Romans, saying, ***“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” (Romans 3:21–22, ESV)***

True righteousness is hidden from view, it exists under the cover of our sins and weaknesses. True righteousness is received in repentance. A repentance which does not take credit for one's confession, but a repentance that beats the breast and prays with the tax-collector in the temple, ***“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13, ESV)*** True righteousness is Christ's righteousness. Just as Jesus alone can take away sin, Jesus alone has lived a righteous life. It is His suffering for us that takes away our sin. It is His righteous living and dying that wins for us the righteousness that covers us and renders us justified before God. The world knows nothing of this righteousness, choosing instead to remain in their sin.

Thus, God is right regarding righteousness. Only the life, death, and resurrection of Christ can stand before God as pure unadulterated righteousness. This is unseen by the world and thus, it is despised. To be clothed in the righteousness of Christ makes one holier than those who parade around in their best and noblest and most revered works. Being clothed in Christ's righteousness makes us more worthy than any worthiness we could ever produce by ourselves.

The world is also wrong about judgment. Everyone goes around judging his neighbor. This is a major issue in our nation today, an unwillingness to forgive and an eagerness to extract retribution through the destructive power of *Cancel Culture*. It's as if religion is all about standing in judgment of others. But the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, shows how the world is wrong, showing instead that it is the ruler of the world, Satan who is judged. The devil is called the ruler, the prince of this world, but he isn't in control, he doesn't govern it. But he does govern the thinking of those who belong to the world and who don't know Christ. Since these people don't enjoy the forgiveness of their sins, they must constantly be looking at the sins of others.

The prince of this world likes to judge. He doesn't judge unbelievers, rather, He likes to judge Christians, but his judgment is false. He points to a Christian's sin and claims that their sin judges them. But that's a lie. Because of His Son's atoning sacrifice, God forgives our sins for Christ's sake. Therefore, God has judged the father of lies and the murderer of souls. He has judged him and thrown him out. The judgment of Satan against Christians cannot stand. He stands judged himself.

God is right about judgment. It doesn't matter how the world sees us or judges us because God is our judge and God has already brought us out of judgment into His grace in which we stand. It doesn't matter how the devil slanders us because he stands judged, condemned. The blood of Christ Jesus which washes away all our sins silences the accuser. Of what sin can he accuse us? Of no sin at all because Christ bore all our sins away.

God justifies us. He pronounces that we are forgiven and righteous. He justifies us by His grace alone. Certainly, we don't deserve it. He justifies us for Christ's sake. Christ Jesus is the One who took away the sin of the world and brought us true righteousness. He justifies us through faith alone. We receive this righteousness and forgiveness through faith which the Holy Spirit implants in our hearts.

Yes, Christ had to depart this earth returning to the Father, making way for the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, our Helper who is to come. He will lead us in all truth and give us the gift of faith to believe. Therefore, we can sing with joy the words of the Introit today: ***"Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him."*** (Psalm 98:1, ESV) In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.