

John 16:5-15 (Cantate)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
May 15, 2022

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Our text is from John 16: *And when [the Holy Spirit comes], He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.*

We saw last week how the last few Sundays of Easter are preparing us for the upcoming feasts of Ascension and Pentecost. At the end of the Easter season, we shift our focus from what Jesus “began to do and teach,” to what He continues to do and teach through His Church in the world today. This morning we again return to the upper room, on the night Jesus was betrayed. Jesus tells His disciples and us that He must go away, He must ascend into Heaven and remove His visible presence from earth. Sorrow fills the disciples’ hearts because they certainly couldn’t carry on this ministry by themselves. But Jesus must ascend into heaven, Jesus must go away, that He might send the Helper, the Holy Spirit. After Jesus ascended into Heaven, the Holy Spirit descended from Heaven to fill the hearts of God’s people. The disciples’ sorrow was replaced with the joy of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who would speak through their testimony to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. That’s exactly what the Holy Spirit does in our lives and in the world today. The Holy Spirit comes to us in God’s Word and through God’s Word convicts us and the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. This morning we consider these three aspects of the Holy Spirit’s Work.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin because, as Jesus says: “they do not believe in me.” The root of all sin, from the very beginning is unbelief. Sometimes we think of sin as merely thinking and doing bad things. Stealing, adultery, fornication, murder, and whatever else

goes against the Law of God are sins. All the sins we commit, the sins we confess at private confession, or the sins we confess in our hearts at the beginning of the Divine Service, really are sins. They are transgressions of God's Law that need to be confessed and forgiven. But sin is so much more than the bad things we think, do, and say. We do bad things because we are sinners. We commit sins because we are by nature sinful and unclean. In the Bible, we learn that sin flows from an unbelieving and sinful heart. In Matthew 15[:19] Jesus says: "out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." Sinful thoughts and deeds flow from a sinful source, like a polluted stream. Sins flow out of a sinful heart.

Oftentimes sinners try to fix sin by fixing what's on the surface. But unless the problem of unbelief is fixed at the source, this unbelief will continue resulting in sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. As St. Paul says in Romans 14:[23], "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." Even if things look good on the surface, whatever does not flow from the faith given to us by God can only be counted as filthy rags (Is. 64:6). If the unclean and unbelieving heart remains, it will continue to overflow with sins. But when God gives us faith, when God creates in us new hearts by giving us the Holy Spirit, then everything we do in faith, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, will be done to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). There are only two options. Either our sinful heart remains and continues overflowing with sins, or the LORD removes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh, creating faith in our hearts, faith that looks to Jesus Christ alone and His death on the cross as the payment for all our sins. When the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, He shows the world that sin is much deeper than we can possibly imagine. The Holy Spirit convinces us that the sins we commit are only the symptom of a much

worse disease: an unbelieving heart. But then that same Holy Spirit works through God's Word to create in us new hearts, hearts that trust in the forgiveness of all sin won for us by Jesus Christ.

Jesus continues, saying that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of righteousness: "because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer." Righteousness simply means doing the right thing, or being in the right. We know from what was already said about sin that of ourselves we are not righteous, least of all before God. We were conceived and born in original sin and so even our works that appear righteous are considered to be filthy rags in the sight of God if those works are not done in faith, because everything that does not proceed from faith is sin. As St. Paul demonstrates in Romans 3[:10-12]: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

But Paul goes on to say that the righteousness of God comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ and in what He did for us: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified, or accounted righteous, by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We are not righteous in and of ourselves, but God counts us as righteous based on what Jesus did for us. Jesus took upon Himself our unrighteousness and in turn gives us His righteousness. We receive that righteousness of Christ by faith. Our experience tells us we are still sinners, that we are still unrighteous. But by faith we believe in something that is not seen, that the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness before God.

This is what Jesus means by saying: "I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer." Christ is our righteousness not only in His death and resurrection. He continues to stand before God the Father on our behalf. In Romans 8[:34] Paul says that "Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is

interceding for us.” It was for our advantage that Jesus removed His visible presence from this world. He went to God the Father to mediate between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), to stand as our advocate before the Father. We sinners cannot approach God, but Jesus is there in our place. Now when God the Father sees us, He sees the righteousness of His Son. In addition, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit Himself, who “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom 8:26). On our own we wouldn’t even be able to do that, but the Holy Spirit, the Helper, helps us in our weakness, crying out to the Father on our behalf. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of the righteousness we have in Christ. We can’t see this righteousness; we can only believe it based on the Spirit’s testimony. And so the entire Holy Trinity is at work in making us right before God.

Finally, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will convict the world “concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” Satan is the ruler of this world, the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). That’s why Satan could attempt to tempt Christ by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world in all their glory (Matt 4:8-9). But Jesus says of His crucifixion: “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” (John 12:32). The title “Satan” literally means “accuser.” Satan used to be like a prosecuting attorney in a court of law. He would stand before the throne of God, accusing God’s people and bringing forth evidence of their sin (Job 1; Zec 3:1). But when Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world all that changed. In Revelation 12[:10ff.] we hear a great voice in heaven: “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” Instead of an accuser, we now have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous one (1 John 2:1). Wherever this Gospel is proclaimed, Satan is cast out, as Jesus says after the 72 disciples

returned with joy, having cast out demons in the name of Jesus: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Jesus now stands as the intermediary between us and God. With Jesus interceding for us, there is no longer room for the Devil to accuse us before God. When Satan raises an accusation against us, God only sees that the offense has already been paid for by the death of Jesus. The blood of Jesus covers all our sins. Satan’s accusations no longer mean a thing. The ruler of this world has himself been judged and it’s only a matter of time before his sentence begins. Of this the Holy Spirit makes us certain.

When we celebrate our Lord’s ascension into Heaven in a few weeks, we remember His words, “it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you.” At Pentecost, our LORD Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment: the sin of the world, the righteousness of Christ, and the judgment of Satan. By means of God’s Word the Holy Spirit convinces us of the true nature of sin, that it is not so much a matter of the fruits of sin but of the rotten source, our sinful hearts. Through God’s Word the Holy Spirit convinces us that the righteousness of Christ becomes our righteousness, too. The blood of Christ covers our unrighteousness and makes us worthy to stand before God in righteousness and purity forever. And through God’s Word, the Holy Spirit convinces us that Satan, the accuser of God’s people, has himself been judged. Jesus ascended into heaven to serve as your advocate before the Father. Satan can no longer accuse you. This message of the Holy Spirit hasn’t changed. He still works in this same way today and will continue working in this way until Christ returns.

And now “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13). In the name of Jesus, Amen.