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

**To Your Advantage That I Go Away**

**John 16:5-15**

Cantate – 5th Sunday of Easter

May 5, 2021

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus told His disciples, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away.”

I can only imagine the thoughts running through the collective heads of Christ’s disciples, “It is to our advantage that you go away? Lord, how do you figure? How possibly could it be good for us that you go away?”

Today is Cantate, so we are considering this text in the setting of our church year, and that would mean that this is the 5th week of Easter. In that Church year chronology, we know that Good Friday is past, Easter and Christ’s resurrection were a couple weeks ago. All this means that we are probably thinking this conversation is taking place – in chronological terms – as post-resurrection, but that is not the case.

Jesus’ words of our text are actually just before the words that Jesus spoke to His disciples in the Upper Room that we considered last Sunday. Yes, Jesus said these words on the same night in which He was betrayed. Although He has spoken of His death, it has no yet happened. It ***will*** happen the day after Jesus is speaking these words.

Jesus’ disciples wanted to ask Him where He was going, but He states that the answer, one He’s already given them, fills their hearts with sorrow. They wanted to ask Him, but they already knew they answer – He had told them. They were hearing His words, but they were not believing them – certainly not understanding them. He has told them that He was going away to go before the chief priests and elders, suffer many things, die, and then rise again. But every time He mentioned it, they were filled with sorrow.

On this particular occasion, He simply tells them that it is to their advantage that he goes away. He explains by saying, “if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

How about yourselves, how would you feel if a dear friend, someone who is very close to you, were to go away? Parents go through the “empty nest” syndrome, especially when their children live more than a few hours away. We do not like being parted from those who are near and dear to us. That sorrow intensifies if that dearly loved one were to depart out of this vale of tears.

Jesus’ words about His departure being to their advantage has a double meaning. Dearly beloved of God, these words of our Lord also have special meaning for you.

Jesus had to go away that evening – it would bring great sorrow to the disciples that He is arrested, tried, brought before Pilate, and then crucified. But Jesus is also speaking to all mankind, He is saying, “it is to your advantage that I go away. You, dear friends, are sinners. From the time of Adam’s fall, sinfulness has corrupted you so completely that there is no salvation, nor eternal life, if I do not go away. I must suffer in your stead, My innocence must be put to death, in order that you may have forgiveness and eternal life. So, it is to your advantage that I go away – to the cross and grave.”

We don’t like to hear this kind of talk. We want nothing more than to bask in the resurrection glory and never again speak of Christ’s suffering and death. That would be wonderful, but to pass over that event would be to deny our sinfulness and our need for the work that Christ accomplished upon the cross.

If it were up to most of us, we prefer to blame the Jews, that wimp Pilate, and the Roman soldiers who carried out His orders. We would like to blame the fickle crowds in Jerusalem. One day those in Jerusalem cried out before Him as they strewed palms on the road, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" On the following Friday, the crowd stood in the Pilate’s courtyard and bellered, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.”

We would like to blame anybody else, we are bound and determined to say, “It wasn’t my fault that Jesus died.” And, if nothing else, we like to think, “Hey, when they crucified Jesus, I wasn’t even a twinkle in great-great-great-grandfather’s eye, much less born. It was ***NOT*** my fault.”

Dear fellow sinners, as much as we want to deny it, Christ went to the cross not just because the high priests, , Pilate, the Roman soldiers, but because the Father ordained that One should die for the sins of all people. Christ died in order that all ***might*** be saved. That they made up the court that condemned Jesus, or that their hands nailed Him to the cross, were only outward manifestations of their total sinfulness. AND, it was to forgive sinfulness that He died. It was their sinfulness, your sinfulness, and my sinfulness for which Jesus had to depart this life through death by crucifixion.

There was a debt that needed to be paid. Jesus, God in human flesh, had to pay the ransom demanded of the Father for sin – blood had to be shed – holy, perfect, innocent blood, for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. It is a debt owed by all mankind.

When Jesus explained His departure in those terms to the disciples, they did not like it. I do not like it! Just like you do not enjoy hearing that you are the cause of the suffering and death of Christ.

That is why there is a second aspect to those words of Jesus. Listen to why Jesus says it is to your advantage that He goes away.

*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.*

It is to your advantage, for if Jesus had not gone away, then the Holy Spirit would not have come. This is not to say that the Spirit wasn’t already there, but unless Jesus left in order to accomplish His work on the cross and rise to justify sinners, then into what means would the Spirit work saving faith? Without Christ’s leaving, without His accomplishing salvation, the Spirit has nothing into which He would place our faith in.

Jesus leaves to accomplish salvation.

Jesus leaves to send the Holy Spirit that we might have faith in His work of salvation.

Dearly beloved of God, how many of you look forward to standing before Jesus, speaking to Him face to face? I know there are some who might say, “Well, I am sort of looking forward to it – but I am also not – I’m not sure how that’s going to go. I know I am not perfect, so not sure I want to face Him in judgment.”

I am looking forward to it! What a glorious day it will be. If I were to do so however, in my present incarnation, I would still have to die. Remember, the disciples were there with Jesus before they died. They had talked with Him face to face, listened to Him at His feet, sat at table with Him and yet – they continued in sin. Their flesh was corrupt, and they ultimately died. Same as you I will one day die.

It was however when Jesus departed and ascended to heaven that Pentecost happened. Even though the disciples had watched Jesus physically ascend, disappearing into the clouds. Jesus was still with them – He was still present with them bodily. He was the Word they heard. His was the flesh they ate when they broke the bread. His was the blood they drank in the cup which they shared.

And the Helper came to them in Word and Sacrament. The Spirit used these incredible means of grace to build faith in them. He began and built in them trust in the work which Christ left the upper room that evening to accomplish.

I know there are those would have loved to been with the disciples, to have been face to face with Jesus – have Him stand right in front of you. People think, “How wonderful would that have been?”

Yet, Jesus told them – and as His Word is recorded in Scripture for your ears – He told you, that it is to your advantage that He went away.

Dear friends, what would you rather do, shake Jesus’ hand, or have Him make His dwelling within you?

Would you rather gaze into His eyes, or have Him enter you by your ears and fill you with His peace?

Would you rather sit at the table with Him and talk politics, or kneel at His table to eat of His body and drink of His blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins?

On the day of your baptism, you did not ***see*** Jesus face to face, but you were, and still are, baptized ***into*** Christ. You are united with Christ, baptized into His death and resurrection, for the forgiveness of sins. What a wonderful advantage it is for us all that Christ departed, and that by the sending of the Helper, you are united to Christ through baptism.

It is to your advantage that Jesus went away, for what joy it is that even now, by the work of the helper, Christ comes into your ear. Christ, God’s enfleshing of “peace on earth, goodwill toward men” comes to you in the Word of Christ proclaimed. Christ comes to you and guards your hearts and minds.

It is to your advantage that Christ went away. Instead of His remaining so that He might physically stand before you, limiting Himself to where His body can be seen, He physically fills you with Himself. Into your mouth He gives to you the very same flesh which washed the feet of the disciples and was pierced on Golgotha’s height. He gives you to drink of the very blood He shed which soaked the earth beneath His cross. Christ fills you! He comes to you with the very forgiveness He purchased.

Yes, it is to your advantage that Jesus went away. For now, He sends the Helper to you. His Spirit – the Helper visits you and fills you with Christ. Christ, your salvation and eternal life, dwells within you. Yes, your Lord God is your strength and your song for He has become your salvation. Your joy is now complete in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.