**To Your Advantage That I Go Away**

**John 16:5-15 - Cantate 05.07.2023**

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

Here it is, the fifth Sunday of Easter, or to put it another way four full weeks after Easter. We are still basking in the glory of the empty tomb. We are in the Easter season, continuing to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord.

I am telling you this because it is important that you understand that our text from John’s Gospel is not a post-resurrection account. In fact, our text is actually from Holy Thursday – the night on which Christ was betrayed – the day before He was crucified.

It is in this context that Jesus told His disciples, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away.”

You and I know the whole story. We have a pretty good idea of Judas’ betrayal with a kiss, and Christ’s arrest that evening in the Garden of Gethsemane, and how Peter Him three times in the courtyard of the High Priest. We could give a decent description of what took place before Pilate, and then on that hill called Golgotha the next day. We also know that on the first day of the next week – or on the following Sunday – the tomb would be empty, Jesus having arisen.

You and I are considering this text in the chronological terms of the church year as we are living it. In our 2023 timeline Good Friday and Christ’s Resurrection are in the past. We are in midst of the Easter season. It is why the paraments are still white. It is no wonder that we would consider this conversation as taking place post-resurrection, but that is not the case. Although He has spoken of His death, it has not yet happened.

They want to ask Him where He’s going, but Jesus tells them that the answer, one He has already given them, fills their heart with sorrow. He’s told them that He was going to go before the chief priest and elders, suffer many things, die, and then rise again, but they were filled with sorrow every time He mentions it.

So, He simply tells them that it is to their advantage that he goes away. if He does not go away, the Helper will not come.

Yes, Jesus’ disciples heard Him declare, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Lk 9:21-22) But as you know, they didn’t understand it. If they had, they would not have gone to the tomb nor been so surprised to see Him on Easter Sunday. Hence their need for the Helper.

Jesus’ words about His departure being for their advantage have a double meaning for His disciples that you share with them. It has that same double meaning for you as well.

That evening’s departure of Jesus would bring great sorrow to His disciples as He was crucified unto death. But Jesus is speaking to all mankind when says, “it is to your advantage that I go away.”

Jesus is declaring, “You, dear friends, are sinners. Since Adam’s fall, sin has corrupted mankind 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 as the sacrificial payment for your sinfulness. This must happen that you may have forgiveness and eternal life.”

We do not like to hear such talk. We would like nothing more than to bask in His resurrection glory and never again speak of Christ’s suffering and death. That may seem be wonderful, but to deny Christ’s cross is to deny our sinfulness and our need for the work that Christ accomplished upon the cross.

How many people like to blame the Jews, that wimp Pilate, and the Roman cohort that carried out His orders. We want to blame the fickle crowds in Jerusalem – one day they strewed palms on the road and cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” The following Friday, Jerusalem’s crowd stood in the Pilate’s courtyard and bellered, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

We’d like to blame anybody else, because we are bound and determined to say, “It wasn’t my fault that Jesus died. I wasn’t there! Since I hadn’t born yet, it wasn’t my fault.”

How did you speak to your spouse the other day?

What did you say about your neighbor?

Who was the “idiot” that needed your help, and you passed by on the other side of the road?

Whose name slipped from your mouth when you looked outside and saw it was snowing on May 1st?

You saying all those things are not evidence of your sinfulness?

Deny it all you want, but Christ went to the cross not solely because of Caiaphas, Pilate, and the Roman soldiers. Our heavenly Father ordained that One should die for the sins of all people – in order that all might be saved. It was not because they condemned Him unjustly, nor that their hands nailed Him to the cross that He died.

It was their sinfulness, your sinfulness, and my sinfulness that Jesus had to depart this life through death by crucifixion. He 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.

When Jesus explained His departure in those terms to the disciples, they did not like it. Neither do I! Nor do you like to hear that you are the cause of the suffering and death of Christ.

That is why there is a second aspect of 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. Not 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 what would the Spirit work saving faith? Without Christ’s leaving, without accomplishing salvation, the Spirit has nothing to place our faith in.

Jesus leaves to accomplish salvation.

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

I look forward to standing before Jesus, speaking to Him face to face! What a glorious day it will be. To do so in my present incarnation in this sinful flesh, I’d still have to die. Remember the disciples were with Jesus before they died, they had talked with Him face to face, listened to Him, sat at table with Him and yet – they continued in sin. Their flesh was corrupt and they ultimately died. You and I will one day die.

After Jesus departed and ascended to heaven Pentecost happened – what they had not understood was now clear to them. They knew why Jesus did all that He had done.

And they declared that Jesus was still with them. 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.

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

How great it would have been to be with the disciples, seeing Jesus face to face. And yet, Jesus told them – and you, by the way – that it is to our advantage that He went away.

What is greater? To shake Jesus’ hand, or have Him make His dwelling within you?

Would you rather gaze into His eyes, or have Him enter your ear 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?

Do you remember your baptism? Did you see Jesus on that day – look at Him eye-to-eye, see Him face-to-face? I personally do not remember that day. You were baptized into Christ on that day. You were united to Christ! Baptized into His death and resurrection, for the forgiveness of sins. This is a miracle wrought by the Word of Christ and the Holy Spirit. What a wonderful advantage it is 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 and into your mouth and fills you with Himself – granting unto you the very forgiveness He purchased.

Yes, it is to your advantage that Jesus went away, for the Helper now comes to you and fills you with this same Christ. Christ is your salvation and eternal life. Amen.