

Cantate
John 16:5-15

Today is *cantate* Sunday. *Cantate* means “to sing.” We should probably call today “Lutheran” Sunday as one of the big marks of being Lutheran is singing great hymns. More than any other denomination of Christians, Lutherans are known for their singing. Thanks to song writers like Martin Luther, Paul Gerhardt, and Paul Speratus and with a composer like Johann Sebastian Bach, this is a well-deserved reputation. Sadly, many Lutherans have abandoned doctrine-rich, Christ-centered, Law & Gospel Lutheran hymns for vacuous revival hymns that focus on you and make you feel good. But that’s a topic for another day. I bring it up because I think it highlights that we are sometimes uncomfortable being distinctly Lutheran. And that’s a shame because Jesus says the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. (v. 13)

The world responds to truth like Pilate does, “What is truth?” (John 18:38) Pilate was dismissing Jesus. The world dismisses truth by claiming there is no such thing as absolute truth. Everything is relative. Gender is not a biological truth, but something the individual makes up for themselves. The baby inside the womb is only a baby if you want it. Differences between male and female don’t actually exist but are remnants of a worn-out patriarchy. Racism is not based on behavior but on whether or not you’re in a particular group that is deemed oppressive. This attack on truth is an attack against Christianity.

Christianity is based on truth. God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is true. Creation from nothing by the command of God in six natural days is true. God making man from the dust of the ground and His own breath and thus making them the pinnacle of His creation is true. The fall into sin by Adam and Eve is true. The immediate promise of redemption by the seed of Eve is true. “Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man, born of the virgin Mary” truly came to save sinners “with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”

Baptism now saves you is true. Holy Absolution, spoken by sinful men, truly absolves because it is God's holy Word of absolution. The word of the apostles is truly the Word of Christ. The Lord's Supper is truly the body and blood of Jesus under the bread and wine. Jesus will truly come again and judge all people and sheep will be saved and goats will be condemned for eternity. These things are true and when the concept of truth is attacked, so are these eternal things.

The truth matters. The truth has eternal consequences. Being Lutheran matters. And being Lutheran has eternal consequences. This is not to say that only Lutherans will be in heaven but, it is to say, that everyone will be Lutheran when they get there. And I'm not really joking. We have the truth crystal-clear in our confessions. Crystal-clear does not mean simple or easy, but it does mean that our confessions stand the test of time as the true confession of what God does and teaches in the revealed source of truth, the Holy Bible. And if you dare to be fully Lutheran, you will cause divisions. Being Lutheran divides because the truth divides.

Even though more biographies of Luther have been written than anyone except Jesus, very few people know what "Lutheran" means. We first called ourselves the Evangelical church. That's because our doctrine focuses on the Evangel, Jesus Christ, and His work on our behalf that He offers us through grace alone. Sadly, "evangelical" has been hijacked by the revival churches and is more associated with emotions and morality than with Jesus. Oh, to be sure, Jesus gets a nod, but the emphasis is really on you and how you live your "Christian" walk. Therefore, we don't identify ourselves as solely the "Evangelical" church anymore. We would love to use the "catholic" church but that has been hijacked by Rome. If you know any Roman Catholics, you know what I'm talking about. Just dare to suggest using "Christian" instead of "catholic" in the creed even though they mean the exact same thing! What they mean is that catholic with a lower case 'c' in the Creeds means "Roman Catholic" with an upper case 'C.'

If you don't like saying you're Lutheran, which I can understand if you get tired of the blank stares, you could say you are Evangelical Catholics. We are both evangelical and catholic. We focus on Jesus, the Evangel, and understand that His work is for everyone, that is, it is universal which is the literal meaning of catholic. We do that same thing as the Holy Spirit. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit "will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you." (v. 14) We, in turn, declare that same message to others. We stand with the Holy Spirit and declare the same message.

Jesus says that the Holy Spirit convicts "the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." (v. 8) First note here that the Holy Spirit convicts the world and not just Christians.

Jesus says the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin because it doesn't believe in Jesus. Disbelief in Jesus is the cause of damnation and not sin. Do you remember when the Pharisees accused Jesus of healing a blind man by the power of Beelzebul? And Jesus rightly points out that a divided house falls and that He's brought the kingdom of God with Himself. And then He says these words: "Whoever is not with Me is against Me." (Matthew 12:30) You're either with Jesus or not with Jesus. There is no middle ground. And the only way to be with Jesus is to know that you need Him. The only way that you know that you need Him is to realize that you are sick with sin. God makes everyone aware through the Law written on everyone's heart and the proclaimed Law.

The Law written on the heart shows up in your conscience. Paul testifies to this in Romans. "When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." (Romans 2:14-16) You see this with atheists who defend natural marriage, that is, marriage between one man and one woman for life.

And when they defend life from the womb to the tomb. The law written on their heart has instructed their conscience about the fourth, fifth, and sixth commandments.

Of course, the conscience is not perfect. It is corrupted by original sin and can be further corrupted by actual sin. If it gets corrupted enough it gets seared in its sin and God gives them up to the lusts of their hearts to impurity. You see this with the “shout your abortion” campaign or with people who want to save the planet at the cost of human life. Original sin and actual sin mar the conscience so that sometimes it counts things as sin that aren’t actually sin and counts things as righteous that are actually sin. The only solution to this problem is the Word of God.

The Word of God reveals to us what is truly sin and what isn’t. That’s why Paul says, “I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’” (Romans 7:7) Coveting is all the rage these days. The world tells you to follow your heart and to do what feels right to you. This justifies all manner of sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, and transgenderism. And woe to you if you proclaim what God says about these things. You are labeled hateful, bigoted, and intolerant. And now there are social costs to standing with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. In Finland, Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola is being charged by the government with incitement against a group of people because he dared to write a pamphlet defending the Biblical view of marriage and sex. He could lose his livelihood and be thrown into jail. And if President Biden is successful in passing his equality act, we could see the same kind of charges here. We need to stand with the Holy Spirit and Rev. Pohjola regardless of the cost.

Jesus also says the Holy Spirit convicts the world of righteousness. He does this by proclaiming Jesus. If you want to see what righteousness looks like, you look to Jesus. He loved God our Father with all His heart and with all His soul and with all His strength and with all His mind and He loved His neighbor as Himself. (Luke 10:27)

Jesus loved His Father by doing what His Father wanted Him to do and said not His own Word, but His Father's Word. He loved the world by giving Himself over to crucifixion to pay for the sins of the world. The image of Jesus on the cross is the perfect image of God's love for you and the rest of the world. The justice and mercy of God meet at the cross and are distributed through Word and Sacrament.

We stand with the Holy Spirit when we tell other people about Jesus. There's a misperception in Christianity that you have to relate what Jesus did for you in your life so that they can relate. The only problem with that is you're not Jesus. Your life is marred with sin and failure. Your life doesn't save people eternally. You will fail people. But Jesus never fails. He is perfect and His life is the life that really matters to your neighbor. We ask others the same question Jesus asked the apostles: who do you say Jesus is? (Matthew 16:15) And then we tell them about Jesus. The Holy Spirit uses that to show the world what righteousness looks like and where the mercy of God may be found.

Jesus says the Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning judgment. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus shows the world that Jesus was victorious over sin, death, and the devil. It doesn't matter how black your sin is. It is paid for by the blood of Jesus. It doesn't matter how quick or drawn out your death is. Jesus broke the power of death and death becomes for you a mere doorway to life eternal. Jesus is the first fruit and we who place our hope in Him follow Him into blessed eternity. It doesn't matter how much the devil rages; he is defeated already. He can harass us and plague us like he did with Job, but our victory is already assured. Nothing can separate us from the love of God! (Romans 8:35-39)

Cantate means "to sing." To be Lutheran means "to sing." We are Lutheran because our doctrine so clearly points to Christ and His work on our behalf. We sing because our sin is paid for by Jesus. We sing because we stand righteous before God for the sake of Christ.

We sing because victory over sin, death, and the devil is ours in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We stand with the Holy Spirit and proclaim Christ to the world! May God continue to keep us steadfast in our confession so that we might eternally sing the praises of our God.

In Jesus' name. Amen.