

John 16.5-15

Cantate

2 May 2021

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Hallelujah! +

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

Beloved in the Lord [and especially you confirmands—Aidan and Averi, Riley, Deacon]: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The time of Jesus; the time of the Church. Salvation won; salvation distributed. Jesus in the flesh; Jesus in His Word and Sacrament.

That's what the Gospel for today is all about.

Not sure if you can see this, but here I've got a quarter in my hand. Let's see. On the one side here there's a picture of George Washington. It says "LIBERTY" over his head. At the bottom it says 1990. On the left side under George's chin it says "IN GOD WE TRUST."

On the other side the eagle from the Seal of the United States spans most of the coin. In the margin above it says "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA." Just over the eagle's head and above his outstretched wings in slightly smaller writing it says, "E PLURIBUS UNUM"—from many, one. At the bottom it says "QUARTER DOLLAR."

So let me ask you: if you went to the store and bought a candy bar—\$1.09 here in Topeka—and laid four quarters, a nickel, and four pennies on the counter to pay for it, which side of the quarter would count?

It's sort of a silly question, isn't it? Whether the clerk saw the American eagle or the face of George Washington, it really wouldn't matter, would it? One side has as much value as the other. One side indicates the same thing as the other.

That's really what the Gospel for today is all about.

Jesus spoke these words on Maundy Thursday evening. It was just hours before His arrest; half a day before His trial; less than a day before His crucifixion, death, and burial.

But, you see, if Jesus is a quarter, the disciples had been looking at just one side—let's say the side with Washington's face on it.

All they knew of Jesus they knew by direct contact. They ate with Jesus, they saw Him sleep, they heard right from His own mouth everything He taught. They saw Him, just as certain as you see me, raising Lazarus from the dead. They had heard Him say with His own mouth, standing right there in the Body before them, "I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." They had overheard Him say to dead Lazarus' sister, "I AM the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." They had heard Him declare to the crowd at the Passover, "I AM the Bread of Life." They had heard Him speak from mortal lips, "I AM the Good Shepherd. I lay down My life for the sheep." Some of them had even heard John the Baptist say of Jesus, "Behold: the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world."

And by all of those things they were comforted. If they had Jesus, then they had all those things. If they had Jesus, they had the forgiveness of sins. If they had Jesus they had a Good Shepherd who loved His sheep so much that He valued their life above His own, so that He'd lay it down. If they had Jesus they had a "food" that gave eternal life. If they had Him they had Him who is the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth, and the life. In short, if they had Jesus, they had everything.

Or, to put it in terms of our coin—if they had the George Washington side, they had a quarter.

But now Jesus is talking about flipping the coin over and showing the other side. The George Washington side can't be seen any longer. "You no longer see Me," Jesus tells the disciples. Why? Because He is going to the Father. The "time of Jesus" is about to be over.

What now?

What does this mean for the disciples? What does this mean for you? If all you know of a quarter is the George Washington side, then what's a quarter when George Washington's profile is hidden from view?

That's the issue in the Gospel for today.

But you know as well as I do that if you flip the quarter over so you can't see George, it's still a quarter. Whether I'm looking at the American eagle or George Washington's profile, the coin is still one quarter of a U.S. Dollar. It's still legal tender. If I have the one side I have the other side. And whether I hand the store clerk four quarters with George's face up or four quarters with George's face down—I still get my candy bar.

And that's just Jesus' point. His absence—His "going to the Father"—is just "flipping the coin." Just because the coin has been flipped doesn't mean the coin's going away. It's still there. Whatever the disciples had in the "time of Jesus" they would have in the "time of the Church"—including Jesus Himself, and all His benefits. If when Jesus was standing before them they had forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, they would have that same thing no less when Jesus was not standing before them.

Why?

Because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Look at what Jesus says the Holy Spirit does: He takes from what belongs to Jesus and declares it to you.

Now look, the obverse—the Eagle side—of a quarter is no less real than the face. If I rub my thumb over the George Washington side I feel the bumps on George Washington's face. If I'm really careful, I can feel the letters in the word LIBERTY. But when I flip it over? Same exact thing. The pattern's a little different. But no less real. I can feel the eagle's head and body protrude a little bit more than his wings. I can even feel the garland he's clasping in his talons.

Beloved in the Lord: Just because Jesus is "gone," just because "you no longer see Him," just because the "time of Jesus" is over and the "time of the Church" has come; just because Jesus has ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit has been poured out on the earth—just because any of that and all of that, it doesn't mean that God deals with you in any less real a way than He dealt with the disciples in the time of His Son's earthly life.

The disciples handled Jesus with their own hands. When they touched Him they touched holiness! That's what John says in His first letter. So through the work of the Holy Spirit do you handle Jesus with your

own hands: He comes to you in and under bread and wine. Touch that, and receive it in the same faith as the disciples had, and you, too, have His holiness.

The disciples heard Jesus speak, sound waves on ear drums, and saw that His Word did something. It raised Lazarus. It healed the blind, the mute, the deaf, the lame, the leprous, the paralyzed. And it forgave sins. So through the work of the Holy Spirit. There's nothing mystical about this. No still, small voice emanating from the bottom of your heart or silently speaking to you from the circumstances of life. But, just like with Jesus, sound waves on ear drums, boldly proclaiming to you that though you are dead in trespasses and sins, Jesus has forgiven you all your sins and made you alive in Him.

The disciples saw Jesus get wet at the Jordan and hear the voice from the cloud say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." The Lord Jesus Himself washed their feet. So through the work of the Holy Spirit does the Lord pour water over your head in His name, wash you of all your sins, and present you before the Father holy and righteous, so that you, too, may hear, "This is My beloved son, this is my beloved daughter. Though a sinner, I count her righteous. Though under the curse of sin and death, I bless him and give him life."

You see? You handle, you hear, you see, you taste—none of it less real than with the disciples. Just the obverse side of the coin. In the Sacraments and the preached Word, every last bit of the Creed that took place in history almost two-thousand years ago in the birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is brought forward. Made yours. Same coin. Different side.

When I was a boy outside of Milwaukee we lived in an area that was being built up. The farmers were selling their farms to developers, and the developers were turning them into subdivisions. It was a great place to grow up, and full of adventure.

My brother Bill and I used to wait till the last workers had left a house being put up and then we'd head over and ride our bikes over the dirt piled up, make jumps out of scraps, climb around inside and outside of the framed structures.

It was a special day when the electricians were working. In those days the junction boxes for the wiring were metal. And as the electricians pulled line they'd knock out the holes, leaving little metal hole covers all over the place. Bill and I would collect them thinking we could trick a vending machine somewhere and get a soda out of the deal.

Of course, all that ever happened was that we'd jam up those slots—and then it didn't matter whether you had hole plugs or nickels. There was no soda to be had.

Now, part of that was the size, to be sure. But part of it was that these just weren't coins. If you felt one side it felt like the other: flat. No face, no obverse. One time we even thought we'd try to slice a nickel in half and somehow glue the face of the nickel on the hole plug. We gave up.

But here's the point: it wouldn't have mattered. Even if we had had the patience to slice through the nickel; and even if we could have superglued the nickel face to the knockout plug, we still wouldn't have had a nickel.

It would have been like Jesus laying down all His work—the face side of the coin—and then just stopping there.

Because, you see, the Gospel is the whole coin. If you have the American eagle on one side but don't have George Washington's face on the other—that is, if you have just some words and some things

called Sacraments without what Jesus has done, you have nothing. And if you have the face side with no American eagle on the back—that is, if Jesus has laid down everything He has, but there are no Word and Sacraments ... just as you wouldn't have a quarter with just Washington's face on it, so would you not have the Gospel, salvation, the forgiveness of sins, heaven, rescue from death and devil, eternal life or anything. In fact, you wouldn't have Jesus Himself.

That's what Jesus is telling you today: it was to your advantage for Him to go away. If Jesus hadn't gone away, the Helper—the Holy Spirit—wouldn't have come. That's just how God set it up. First the time of Jesus, then the time of the Holy Spirit. First the time of the physical presence of Jesus on earth, then the time of the mystical Body of Jesus, the Church. First the time of Jesus in the flesh, then the time of Jesus in His Word and Sacraments.

And so 10 days after His departure on Ascension Day Jesus fulfilled the promise of John 16. He showed the obverse of the coin. It didn't make the coin any less the coin it always was. In fact, it just made it the whole coin it was always intended to be. That happened on Pentecost. He poured out the Holy Spirit on all flesh, so that Baptism isn't "just water on my head," but death with Christ and resurrection with Christ. So that Christ's words aren't "just words in my ears," but they carry Christ and His voice, according to His promise, "He who hears you hears Me," and they forgive sins. And so that communion isn't just Bread and Wine, but Christ's true Body and Blood—yours to eat and to drink in faith—for the forgiveness of all your sins.

That's the work of God the Holy Spirit. He receives from Christ everything that is His. And He gives it to you. You see just the obverse of the coin. But don't for a minute think that when you grab that coin looking at its obverse it's only part of the coin. It's the whole coin. Just like the chief hymn for today says, "At all times sing God's praises / For these His gifts of grace. / For he who on them gazes / Beholds God's kindly face."

By them, and by them alone, will He graciously sustain you to all eternity, when, risen from the dead like Christ your Lord, you'll see the other side of the coin just like the disciples did.

God grant it you all for Christ's sake, [and especially you confirmands—Aiden, Averi, Deacon, and Riley].

Amen.

pax domini, etc.

jsb
sdg