

Cantate

Isaiah 12:1-6; James 1:16-21; Jn 16:5-15

May 10, 2020

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

To what do you attribute the Coronavirus? Is it a product of a Chinese wet market? Is it a bioweapon? Did it escape from a lab in Wuhan? I don't know the answer. But I still know where the Coronavirus came from – at least on the most macro level.

God made the world good. Corruption and death entered the world as God's punishment for human rebellion. So I have no problem saying the Coronavirus is because of the wrath of God.

I won't say it's because of this or that sin. But God's Word teaches us to see all the world's corruption as coming from that same source, be it a virus, a rotten apple, cancer, a cockroach, a conflagration.

St. Paul says, **“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”** (Rom. 1:18). The Law shows us that the wrath of God is not just a general condition of a world gone wrong. We have gone wrong. My corrupt desires, your greed, my cantankerousness, your lust, my pride, your selfishness – God's Law shows us that we deserve God's wrath.

God's wrath is deserved. Our wrath is not. If a man is angry, Jesus says, he has already committed murder in his heart. This is why St. James today tells us to **“be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”** This is the first of two weeks that we have a reading from St. James.

You may be familiar with Luther's comment about the Epistle of James as an “epistle of straw.” He made this comment in 1522, still very early in the Reformation. He was reacting against people who used James to argue

against Paul, and the Bible teaching on justification, i.e., how God declares us righteous by His grace.

I'm bringing this up because I think it's important that you know this truth: Lutherans don't follow Luther. Lutherans don't believe in an infallible leader. Luther said many rash things that we rightly ignore.

I was reminded of Luther's over-the-top personality when I read a book about Winston Churchill a few months ago. One of his assistants said that Churchill came up with 100 ideas a day. Three of them were brilliant, and the rest were insane. Their job was to sift out the brilliant ones and make sure the crazy ones never saw the light of day. Reading Luther can be a little like that.

Many of you are newer to Lutheranism, so I just wanted to make sure you get this point straight: the genius of Luther was in pointing us to the Word of God and away from himself. He saw the way church leaders fornicated, abused their power, abused their people, and stole their money. He had a laser-like focus on the love of God for us in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

But that didn't stop him from seeing the importance of God's Law in the life of the Christian. In fact, it all hangs together. In a sermon on today's reading from James, Luther said, "There are two things that tear people away from the Gospel. One is wrath and impatience, and the other is evil desires (LW 77). Those are both in our reading from James. Which of these are you struggling with? Perhaps both. Are you **"quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger"**? Or are you slow to hear, but quick to speak and get angry? Have you **"put away all filthiness"**? *Filthiness* can be translated as *moral uncleanness*. This is not only gross immorality; it also includes every way that you live for yourself, thinking only about how you can be successful or have leisure.

We deserve God's wrath. The song of thanksgiving in our first reading today, from Isaiah, anticipates the wrath of God being turned away.

**“I will give thanks to you, O Lord,
for though you were angry with me,
your anger turned away,
that you might comfort me.”**

This is the Church’s song. In Jesus, God has turned His wrath away.

Our natural self doesn’t like this song. With Frank Sinatra, we would rather sing, “I did it my way.” Songs that praise our country, chants for our favorite sports teams, songs that motivate us to be our best – those are the songs in harmony with our nature, our original sinful nature.

But the new song of faith thanks Christ for His work for us. And it is a song of trust. When your child is sick, and you are afraid for him; when you are out of work and don’t know how it’s going to get fixed; when you feel death creeping in you; when you are lonely or melancholy and don’t know where to turn – the new song of faith is for you:

**“Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the Lord God is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation.”**

Those who sing this song stop being so angry, and become gentle toward others. They know how this story ends. They know how this world ends. Jesus says in today’s Gospel, **“The ruler of this world is judged.”**

This world is ruled by the devil and those occupied with his lusts and desires. But that whole world-system already stands condemned. You are governed by something—or rather *Someone*—different. In your Baptism you received the Spirit of truth. In His Word is truth.

You may not know the truth about the origins of the Coronavirus, or whatever other scandal is occupying social media today. You know the truth about the world. It was made by God. It has fallen into corruption. But God is making all things, including this dying world, new.

You know the truth about Jesus. He died for your sins. He bore your sorrows. He is risen from the dead, never to die again.

And so you know the truth about yourself. You are a sinner, born into a corrupt world. But God still loves you. You are His creature. Your life has meaning. Your death is not the end. Your body will rise again. Though God was angry with you, His anger is turned away. You will say in that day, and you will sing even now, **“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid.”**

In the Name of + Jesus

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.