

Cantate (5th Sunday of Easter)/Graduation/Sunday School Rec.: May 14, 2017
“Perfect Gift Giver”

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

What a busy day today. At Zion this morning we celebrated baptism and bore witness to the birth of a child into the Kingdom of God. In my personal family we celebrate the birth of a child born into the earthly family just over 30 years ago on this day. At St. Luke's we recognize our graduates. We recognize our Sunday School children who successfully completed their memory work this year. We give Bibles and Catechisms to students to further their study and strengthen them in God's Word. And today we also celebrate a national holiday where we recognize a blessed gift given by God, Mother's Day.

For all of these events and more, they carry one common theme: gift-giving. We search and strive for the perfect gift to fit not only the occasion, but also something useful. It can be extremely frustrating, can it not? We wrestle for the perfect gift, and someone out does us. Worse yet, even our best gifts wither and break over time. In this fleeting world, nothing lasts forever.

As wonderful as these occasions are today, I know they are not all sunshine and roses. This is due to the other gift that we give. The gift that no one really likes to talk about. The gift that is hard to talk about. On many of these days, we cannot help but think back to when our children were born. Rightly, we celebrate the birth of a child. Smiles and joys abound, as we share the pictures, the cigars, chocolate, bubblegum and tears as that little bundle of joy takes its first breath and from its first squeaks and cries joins our family's ongoing conversation. And then we bring them to font? Why? Because we know the other gift that we as parents give to our children: sin and its effects.

We don't like to talk about it, and it usually doesn't show up on Facebook feeds, “Welcome to the world the newest sinful corrupted human being.” That would be absurd, but it is the truth. We know that. God tells us and our experience confirms it, and so we gather around God's Word and God's Sacraments for His Gift.

Have you ever wondered where we learn gift giving? Maybe you figured it out long ago. We learn how to give gifts from our parents, who in turn learned it from their parents, who learned it from their parents, and this we can trace back to our first parents, Adam and Eve. And where did they learn the practice of giving gifts? They learned it from God Himself!

They were blessed with all sorts of physical and spiritual goods and gifts. They were given, in absolute perfection, body and soul, eyes, ears, and all members, reason and all senses, food and drink, house and home, wife, land, animals, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, godliness, kindness, faith, love, righteousness, grace, meekness, God's Word, patience and the like.

As our text recalls, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."¹ Not only does He give the gifts, but our God is unchanging. He does not vary. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. In this way, we can read the Scriptures and know exactly who our God is.

As you read through God's Holy Word, you don't get very far and you see man's impact on this world. God created all holy and good, and man through disobedience, sought to be like God. He did not fear, love, or trust in God above all things, and thus plunged mankind into the curse of sin, and passes on its wages, which is death. Through Adam's fall, sin enters all of creation and now these perfect gifts are corrupted with sin. To eat is hard work. Marriage is hard work. Peace is hard work. Healthy living is hard work. To be kind is hard work. Strength wains, weather fluctuates, children aren't always obedient, the government does shabby things, neighbors spurn one another, and patience is problematic. Where mankind was created in the image of God, that is morally righteous and perfect; since Adam's fall man is now born, as Genesis 5 records, "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth."² Since the fall, man is born in God's image now corrupted with sin.

This is the reality sung in the Psalms, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."³ God gives us the life of a child, and we bring it into this world through conception and birth sinful and unclean. We do our best to raise them. We teach and we try hard, and we still do sin. It is precisely for this reason, we daily remember our baptism. With the birth of water and Word, God shows us that our earthly birth is corrupted in sin and the curse is inherited from Adam, but mercifully God called

¹ James 1:17

² Genesis 5:1-3

³ Psalm 51:5

us to the sonship of grace, and by the rebirth of Baptism, He has adopted us as newborn children.

Jesus wonderfully speaks, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things.”⁴ Our Heavenly Father has always given good gifts to His children. Even after the Fall, He clothed Adam and Eve by sacrificing part of His own creation. He continued, throughout the sacrificial system to cover the sins of His people with the blood of the sacrifices that all find their end, their completion, in the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus was God’s greatest and most perfect gift. He was the Word of truth in the flesh. “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”⁵ On the cross, Jesus through His death declared, “It is finished.”

Jesus has restored man’s image with God. He has won peace for us. He has died to set us right with our Heavenly Father. Remember how I said God doesn’t change? Hear again the Gospel reading during the Rite of Baptism, “And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.”⁶

He continues to bless His children. He comes today and brings the fruits of the cross. Through these blessed waters, just what does a family member receive? Forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation as the words and promises of God declare.

The gift of God’s Word, joined with God’s gift of water has this overwhelming effect: It is “a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: ‘He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ

⁴ Matthew 7:11

⁵ Isaiah 53:4–5

⁶ Mark 10:13–16

our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying.”

These are gifts of God all given to us by grace. We are given godliness, kindness, faith, love, righteousness, grace, meekness and all through God’s Word. God causes the heavenly seed of His divine Word to be sown and preached among us through Christ His beloved Son. As our graduates get set to branch out, how wonderful that we graciously live in a time where God’s Word can be weekly preached and daily read. This regenerated heart has the wonderful opportunity to be continually fed and strengthened, as it hears the Word of God proclaimed again and again and again. This seed is planted today, and has a lifetime of cultivating, fertilizing, sunshine, watering, and perhaps seedbearing, before it is harvested. This seed does not rely on itself. These graduates, these Sunday School children, are surrounded by you all, parents, grandparents, and many brothers and sisters in Christ, to keep this seed ever in the good soil, ever being in the Son, ever fed and strengthened by the only source, the Vine Himself, Jesus Christ.

Of all the gifts given this time of year, I can’t help but think of the source of those gifts, and these words spoken by the gift Himself concerning His own sacrifice, “Given and shed, for you, for the forgiveness of sins.” The truth of this unchanging Jesus and His grace is well summed up in these words connecting Christians of all ages,

“Fear not! I am with you, O be not dismayed,
For I am your God and will still give you aid;
I’ll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

Throughout all their lifetime My people will prove
My sov’reign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And then, when gray hairs will their temples adorn,
Like lambs they will still in My bosom be borne.”⁷

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

⁷ LSB 728 How Firm a Foundation: stanzas 2, 5