

## The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter – *Cantate*

### Text: Psalm 118:15

Glad songs of salvation  
are in the tents of the righteous:  
“The Lord’s right hand of the LORD has done mighty things,

### Theme: “We Sing in Spite of Everything...”

It is the Year of our Lord 303. There have already been several persecutions against the early Christians. But the Lord has given His church the strength to weather them all, and the church has only grown despite them all. But now the Roman Emperor Diocletian desires to wipe out Christianity once and for all with a final persecution that is greater than any that has ever gone before. Those Christians who do not renounce their faith are put through some of the greatest sufferings imaginable. In fact, about 20 years later at the Council of Nicea every Christian Bishop had some kind of mark on his body from these persecutions.

The emperor comes up with an idea that would surely make any Christian renounce their faith. In one of the Roman arenas, where there are usually battles between wild animals and gladiators, he has a special surprise for the bloodthirsty spectators. Instead of trained gladiators, he is going to send defenseless Christians to battle the lions. The stadium is full of spectators. Suddenly, they hear singing. The singing becomes louder when suddenly a door opens and the Christians enter the arena, wearing white robes. They are singing songs of praise to God, that the Lord has done mighty things.

The spectators let out an almost demonic laugh. Do these Christians really think that they can stop hungry lions with their singing?

Then you hear the roar of the lions. Another door opens, and the lions attack the group of defenseless Christians. It is a sight, which pleases the crowd that day, but something that we don’t want to even begin to imagine. But even as the lions are attacking and killing the Christians, the singing continues. They sing of victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. Then suddenly all is quiet.

Since those early days, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter has been called “Cantate,” which means “to sing.” The introit begins, “*Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things.*” But how could you say that God had done marvelous things for those poor Christians that day? Didn’t He fail His people? Weren’t His people defenseless? Shouldn’t He have found a way to destroy the lions or at least shut their mouths as He did with Daniel? Shouldn’t those who were persecuting the Christians have been eaten by the lions as happened to Daniel’s enemies? It sounds like the devil won a resounding victory that day, and that God was beaten.

But think for a moment about a similar day when it seemed as though the devil won and God had lost. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was nailed to a cross. He suffered for three hours while people mocked Him and taunted Him to come down. Then He died. In his Easter hymn CFW Walther writes, “**In satan’s domain did His hosts shout and jeer, for Jesus was slain whom the evil ones fear.**” But on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day God proved that this day was actually His greatest victory. On Easter morning Jesus rose from the dead to show His victory. He descended into hell to make a spectacle

of the devil. By His death, Jesus had destroyed the power of death. He lives forevermore, and He has the keys to death and hell. (Rev 1:18)

Those Christians that day had a share in Christ's victory. As their song began to disappear on earth, new voices were added to the choirs of heaven. Those Christians are no longer a small little band, but they are singing with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven that the Lord's right hand has done mighty things. It appeared as though these Christians had lost their lives when in reality, they received the crown of eternal life with their Savior in heaven.

It is a miracle of God when He gives a suffering, weak person the power to stare death in the face, and sing a hymn of praise. Throughout the centuries millions of Lutheran Christians have sung this hymn verse in their dying hour,

Lord, let at last Thine angels come, To Abr'ham's bosom bear me home,  
That I may die unfearing; And in its narrow chamber keep  
My body safe in peaceful sleep Until Thy reappearing.  
And then from death awaken me, That these mine eyes with joy may see,  
O Son of God, Thy glorious face, My Savior and my fount of grace.  
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend, And I will praise Thee without end.

This makes no sense to the unbelieving world. They hang on to the last thread of this life with all their might. For them there is nothing beyond this life. At least they think so, but they don't realize that without Christ, the first death is only a beginning of an eternity of suffering, an eternity separated from the goodness of God.

But it is much different for the Christian. We know that the joys of this life are like a breath. They are all fleeting, even the good ones. There are also times when this life is hard and full of crosses to bear, but we know that our Lord is with us and that He is leading us to the place where there is no more sin or suffering or death.

Throughout our lives we can sing that the Right Hand of the Lord has done mighty things. But what is the right hand of the Lord? Think about what we confess in the creed, **“the 3<sup>rd</sup> day [Jesus Christ] rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty.”** Jesus Himself is the Right Hand of the Lord. He has won the victory by His passion, and no one can take that victory from us. His victory belongs to all who know Him as their Savior.

But what does this mean for our daily lives? You might think that this all sounds a little like “pie in the sky.” There are so many difficulties in this life. Who can sing of the salvation of the Lord when there is so much suffering in the world today. There is hunger and so much need all around us. People live in fear of many things. There is the threat of fear of war all over the world. Worst of all we see the evil in our own lives. We live in guilt of our sins. Who can sing when we see so much evil in the world today?

But Jesus comes to you and me and says, *“Take heart, I have overcome the world.”* (Jn 16:33) He says, *“Take heart son, daughter, your sins are forgiven.”* (Mt 9:2) He has won our salvation. He is the Right Hand of the Father who has done mighty things. Our fretting and worrying don't help a bit. In his hymn “Commit Whatever Grieves Thee,” Paul Gerhardt writes,

On Him place thy reliance  
If thou wouldst be secure;  
His work thou must consider  
If thine is to endure.  
By anxious sighs and grieving  
And self-tormenting care  
God is not moved to giving;  
All must be gained by prayer.

It is a great blessing of God when we can confidently say with St. Paul in Romans 8, “*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (38,39) Whoever is so certain of God’s love in Jesus Christ can sing in the face of any threat. In his hymn, “Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me?” Paul Gerhardt writes,

7. Hopeful, cheerful, and undaunted  
Everywhere They appear  
Who in Christ are planted.  
Death itself cannot appal them,  
They rejoice When the voice  
Of their Lord doth call them.

The psalmist declares, “*Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous,*” Let our homes be such tents, that we might sing of the salvation of the Lord in spite of every need, sorrow or even our own guilt that plague us. “*The Right Hand of the Lord has done mighty things.*” Jesus Christ has won the victory for us. When we have this song in our hearts, it gives us comfort, joy, and peace in any situation in life. The songs of our world make a lot of noise, but they don’t do anything for us. Our songs praise God for His mighty deeds. We sing of His love and salvation for us, a victory over all evil and even death itself. Sing of the mighty deeds that the Lord’s Right Hand has done and those songs will give you peace and joy, even in the most difficult and fearful days of your life.

Amen.

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