

“The true power” John 14:8-17(25-27)

8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. 12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. 15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

25 "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14:8-17, 25-27)

Grace and peace to you all from God the Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today we celebrate the reception of the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus ascended into the heaven He said to His disciples: “Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49) Yes, “with power from on high.” With the power!

As we heard in today’s Scripture reading, this promise was fulfilled in Pentecost. The apostles, or we can say, the Church received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were closed with power from on high to be able to carry on their mission.

In Lutheran church we are not used to talk too much about the Holy Spirit. We know that other churches, especially Pentecostals, have this emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Everyone tries hard to receive the Holy Spirit and His gifts.

Gospel verses which we read today have served for them almost as guidelines. Remember, ‘whoever believe will do things greater than Jesus’. ‘Whatever you ask in my name, it will be given to you’. ‘The Holy Spirit whom I’ll send to you, he will teach you everything’.

We know also where these emphases have lead them. They are seeking for the gift of tongues, trying to do some healings, some casting out of demons, and so on. Just like Jesus did and even more. For them the Holy Spirit is a power. A power that can help to do whatever we want if only we can master how to use it.

All these practices may seem strange at the first sight. But we actually can understand why they do all of this. Because they desperately need some evidence that God is really in favour to them. They need a good conscience – I'm accepted by God. According to this logic, if you have any of these supernatural abilities, this gives you assurance that you have God's favour, for He is given you His Holy Spirit.

What about the role of the Holy Spirit in our Lutheran church? We often talk about the Father and especially the Son, but this is, indeed, our fault that we do not add one more person to this duo. The Holy Spirit. For the Son and the Spirit go together.

When we read the Creation account in the beginning of the Bible, who was hovering above the waters when God spoke His word? Right - the Spirit (Gen 1:2). When we read about the incarnation of the Word, who came upon virgin Mary? Right - the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:35) When Jesus was baptized, who descended from the heaven as a dove? Yes, the Holy Spirit. (Mt 3:14-17) When Jesus did His ministry, in what power did He do it? Of course, in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:39). In His resurrection Jesus rouse again by what power? Sure, by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 1:4)

One of the greatest theologians of all times, Irenaeus, said that the Word, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are the two hands of the Father. With these two hands God the Father does everything - creates, saves and sanctifies.

This is beautiful, and this is true, but what does it mean for us practically? Where is the Holy Spirit? How can we receive Him?

This is the first thing to remember. Very important! When the Bible talks about the Holy Spirit, what kind of pronoun is used? 'He'. Indeed, we use the pronoun 'he', not 'it'. We are not talking about some kind of inanimate object or power.

Pronoun "he" designates a person. Indeed, a person. When we think about receiving the Holy Spirit, we cannot think about obtaining some kind of a power. 'Here it is, I've got it, now I'm Christian for I've got the Holy Spirit.' Done.

The Holy Spirit is God, He is one of the Trinity. Our relations with Him are not about something we can obtain. This is not a purchase, this is not a deal. Not at all. Our relations with the Holy Spirit are relations. Remember this – relations! This is not about getting it once, it is about being in relations and continuously receiving Him.

We can compare it with a marriage. We receive our spouse when we got married. But we don't stop receiving our spouse when we are married. Quite opposite, we start receiving the blessings of having a spouse after the wedding ceremony and continue doing it till the end of our lives. What is important, we keep receiving not somewhere, but only where our spouse is.

The same we can say about the Holy Spirit. He is given to us in our Baptism. When we are baptized God the Father hugs us with both His arms – with the Word and with the Holy Spirit. We receive the Spirit in our Baptism, but this is just like a wedding ceremony. From then on we are in relations in which we can continually receive Him. How? Remember, whenever we have the word of God, there we have also the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself said, that “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” (John 6:63)

Whenever we hear the words of Jesus spoken we know that there is also the Holy Spirit. The words and the Spirit always come together and never separately. As soon as we realize that the word of God and the Spirit come together, we know exactly where we can receive the Holy Spirit. Wherever we hear the words of God.

Where do we hear them? Primarily and the most importantly in the Divine Service. We begin the service invoking the presence of the Triune God. In the Absolution, when a pastor, by Christ command, forgives the sins of those who repent, these are not the words of a man, these are the words of God, and they come together with the Holy Spirit, who by these words actually liberates us from the bondage of sins.

When we all together confess the truth that God has reveal to us in His words, we do it united in the Holy Spirit. When we hear Bible readings and sermons, these are the words of God spoken to us and they always, always [!] come together with the Spirit. When we receive the Christ Himself in the Holy Communion, He is there together with the Holy Spirit. They are always together.

If we are in the Divine Service, how can we know whether we have receive the Holy Spirit, or not? If we have tears, or goose bumps, or speaking in tongs...

No, God has made it much simpler for us. Whenever we hear the Absolution, whenever we hear the words of God, His holy Gospel, whenever we receive the Sacrament, we can be 100% sure that we receive the Holy Spirit. He comes to us to strengthen our faith to, to bring us closer to Christ and to protect us from the evil one.

We can almost say, that in the Divine Service we can hear the Holy Spirit, we can see Him, and touch and taste and smell Him, as He comes to us in the Word and Sacrament. There cannot be stronger assurance that we have received Him than this...when all our senses testify about Him.

The Holy Spirit embraces us when we walk through our life. He is faithfully with us always and does what Jesus promised. Even when we don't know about it.

There is one more way we can see Him powerfully at work in our life. From the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy and peace. Remember that Jesus said that those who believe will do greater things that He did.

If we stop for a moment and think what is that what Jesus did, what we've got written down in the gospel accounts; healing of the sick, all who were brought to Him, raising of the dead, numerous times, casting out of demons, rebuking the storm, feeding of the thousands, and not just once, and so on. Are we really going to do the things that are greater? Jesus, you must be kidding?!

We need to understand that great and powerful things in God's eyes are probably something different that great and powerful things in the world's eyes. Let's look at this one example.

Most of you will remember the story told by Mark in the second chapter of his gospel account. Jesus was teaching in His home and four men brought the paralytic to Jesus. As they couldn't approach Jesus through the door, they removed the roof and let him down with his bed. Do you remember what Jesus said?

What was He expected to say? Something about healing... But Jesus said: "Your sins are forgiven!" What a disappointment for the paralytic! This is not what he was after. And what an offense to scribes! "He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?!"

What did Jesus do? Only when He saw the scribes grumbling He asked: "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"-- he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home."

Which of these two is a greater thing from our human perspective – the forgiveness or the healing? Of course, the healing. This man could walk again. But which of these was harder for Jesus. Healing? No. As we can see from that text, for Him the hardest thing was to say: "Your sins are forgiven."

He knew what it will cost Him to be able to deliver this forgiveness. To be able to say these words. Of course, these are just words for our ears, but they wouldn't have any power whatsoever if Jesus hadn't died taking all our sins upon Himself. All of our sins. All of mine sins, and all of your sins. Those which we have already done and those which we'll still manage to do.

We cannot comprehend and we cannot explain the way how God did this. One thing we can know – for Jesus to say 'I forgive you your sins', it cost Him a whole lot. To be specific, it cost Him His life.

This is the true power of God. Delivering the forgiveness. Apostle Paul puts in wonderfully writing that this message about the forgiveness of sins is “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ *the power* of God and *the wisdom* of God.” (1Co 1:23-25)

Unfortunately, we know what the words ‘power and strengths’ often mean for this world. Friend of mine, he somehow believed that he also is a Christian, said that he has learn what does it mean to be a strong personality. It is quite simple.

When someone offends or hurts you, you need to hurt him or her so strongly that they would never dare to do it to you again. Then you exclude them from your life, and if you are really strong you ignore them till the end of your life.

Does this sound somehow familiar? Does it resonate with what you have experienced about what is strengths in the eyes of this world? I have to admit that already in my family we have vivid examples of how it happens. In my life I have met maybe few families that haven’t had to deal with this kind of power and strength in human relations.

This is the strength and power of this world, when you trample on others so that your will may happen. So that you can triumph. It doesn’t matter how many hearts are hurt or even broken. Whatever... I’m strong. In reality this is a weakness when we cannot be strong in God, but need to trample on others to get the feeling of power.

And now, if you want, you can close your eyes and try to portray this picture of spiritual reality. Every time when someone, or we ourselves, act according to the rules of this kind of worldly power, Satan and sin fasten us with one more chain.

Every time when, instead of forgiving or asking for forgiveness by the power of the Holy Spirit, we decide that we are strong and we are not going to humiliate ourselves, - every time Satan ties us tighter and tighter.

Until we are so ‘strong’, or so strongly tied, that we don’t care anymore about others. In this way Satan rules this world; when we do not use the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. Then we are weak and the evil one takes over.

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we are sent to “open eyes, so that people may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus.” (Act 26:18)

You see, there is this spiritual dimension of our life which we can see not by our eyes, but only through the word of God, when we are enlightened by His Spirit.

After His resurrection Jesus said to the disciples: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”... “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (John 20:21-23)

Once more, just imagine. And I'm not asking you to image something that is not real, but to image how the things really are. Imagine that every time when, following the example of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit we humbly forgive to those who have done wrong to us, or even go out and bring them our forgiveness, or ask for the forgiveness when we have done wrong, every time, by the power of the Spirit we brake the chains by which Satan has bound us and people around us.

What may seem as weakness in the eyes of the world, is God's power by which He triumphs over the devil and sin. To repair broken relationships is very difficult, we have spoken about it repeatedly, to forgive those who have hurt us, especially if they are very close to us, it is so much against our will.

It is difficult to do it on our own. Because we fear that we will look helpless and weak in the eyes of this world. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. He helps us to see the world spiritually through the eyes of Jesus. He helps us to be strong and do things that are great in God eyes.

When we know that only the Children of God have the Holy Spirit, when we know that we are made the children on God in Holy Baptism, when we know that we have receive Him and continually receive Him every time when we come to the Divine service, when the Holy Spirit Himself testifies that we are the members of the mightiest, the most powerful royal family – then we can enjoy the true power of God.

Then there is no need to prove to someone that we can be strong in worldly sense. Because we are strong in the Holy Spirit, we are powerful in our God. When we have this assurance we can enjoy the fruits of the Holy Spirit: peace, joy and love. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:25-27) I'm with you always.

When our identity is deeply rooted in our God by the power of the Holy Spirit, there is no need to fear, we can humble ourselves bringing liberation to others. This is not to prove anything. This is to prosper in peace, love and joy when we walk our life in the true power given by the Holy Spirit.

Amen.