

„I owe my God” John 16:12-15

12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12-15)

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty, from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

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

The words, which we heard in today's Gospel reading, Jesus spoke on that evening when He was betrayed and handed over to Jewish and Roman authorities. A lot has changes since that evening. Jesus has gone to the Father. He has sent us another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has revealed a lot about the Father and about the Son. Now we have this beautiful revelation of who true God is, we know His name. And His name is - the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament we have God's self disclosure as clear as never before. We know that He is one God, but three persons. The Trinity. Triune God. Unique and incomprehensible. This knowledge about God has an enormous foundational importance for our Christian faith.

Just think about it. How does every Christian congregation around the world already for 2000 years begin their divine service? In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. How is every single Christian during the last 2000 years brought into the Church in Holy Baptism? In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

When pastors around the world announce the grace of God and forgive all our sins they do it in... yes, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. To which God we confess our faith every time when we meet in the Divine Service? Right, to the Triune God.

The whole Christian church has few creeds in common – Apostle’s Creed, Nicene Creed and Athanasius Creed. What are they all about? Of course, they all are the Church confessions about God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

All our Christian life is permeated by the presence of Triune God. But, let me ask this question? Of course, we know that this is how our God has revealed Himself, but does it really matter if we have Triune God, or maybe this would be enough to confess that we believe that there is only one God as Israel did during the Old Testament time? What difference would it make? Practically. For us as Christians in Barossa?

It is not an easy question if we haven’t thought about it before. Is there a real difference? Last Sunday we mentioned that we rarely talk about the Holy Spirit. The same we can say also about the Trinity. It is not something we reflect on too often. But we should.

Philip Melancton was the colleague of Dr. Martin Luther. He is the author the famous phrase that ‘we can know our God only through His gifts’. What does it mean? If we want to answer what difference it makes to have Triune God we need to look what are the gifts we receive from Him.

There is no better place to go than one of our Lutheran Confessions, namely, Luther’s Small Catechism and His explanation of Apostles’ Creed.

Let us read and confess together Luther’s explanation of the first article.

What is this?

I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him.

This is most certainly true.

These words can be as sweet as honey or as bitter as wormwood. Why? If we trust our God to provide for all these things and also treat all we have and even all what we are as His unmerited gifts, then this is a beautiful reminder of how generous, and abundant in mercy our God is. Then we are free to live for others with all that we have.

Unfortunately, as Martin Luther so rightly emphasized, this is the hardest article to believe. Because it takes away all our merits, all our self constructed identities and self-designed importance of who we are.

Just think, we are His creation, as everything in this Universe. Even our bodies are God given, and not just in the beginning, but He continually preserves them, our senses, our reason, and mental faculties. We just use them as if they belong to us. But if we stop for just a minute and reflect – as Jesus said – “for you cannot make even one hair white or black. (Mat 5:36)

We don’t know even how exactly our bodies function. They are too complex for a one person to understand, especially in our age when the amount of information grows so quickly. Our bodies serve us so well with all these trillions of living cells working together in miraculous ways, and only when something doesn’t work right we realize ... we are not in control. Our bodies function regardless of the level of our understanding, and deliver for us unbelievable life experiences. They are gifts of God.

In addition God the Father provides for us everything we need for living. Everything. He does it through the creation as through His masks. He gives light and water for every living thing, He send our loved ones in our life, He provides for our daily needs. I remember that pastor Peter Hartwick showed us how much our work contributes to the growing of food in our fields. Five percent if I remember correctly. But we have food. Plenty of it. This soil produces much more food than we need... by God’s grace.

We may think that we have achieved what we have. Indeed? How much of what we have we actually can claim as our achievement? I’m afraid that if we’d spend some time calculating we could again come up with something like... five percent.

Have we contributed to where we were born? Have we contributed to what genes we inherited from our parents? To what gifts and abilities we have? Have we contributed to the cultural-historical situation where we were born and to opportunities it opened for us?

As one pastor said: “If you think that you have achieved all you are and all you have with your hard work, just think how much could you achieve being born in Mongolia sometimes in 11th century? Or even today... Everything we have and everything we are - these all are gifts of God the Father.

Besides we are so concerned with our security. We want to be sure that everything is under control. How can we protect ourselves, our future? Insurance, savings, possessions, degrees, powerful friends... Read the news about the tornado this week in Oklahoma. And then think how much can you protect yourself?

Think how much time and energy we put building our security, trusting not to God our Father, but created things. We take His gifts and treat them as they were gods, who could give us what only true God can give us.

Regardless of how offensive and rebellious are our actions and attitudes, God protects and shields us. Daily. Whole our life. Not because we deserve it, not because we are worthy of it, but only of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy. This is most certainly true.

What about the Son, the second person of Trinity?

What is this?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my LORD. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.

What does it practically mean to have this Triune God who came to us as a true human being Jesus Christ? One word. Lord. He is my Lord. He is our Lord.

Jesus has done something unbelievable for us. He has redeemed and freed us from sin, from the death and the power of the devil. So what? Everything! It means that for us there is no need to be afraid from the death, it means that sin and the devil have no more power to destroy us. We are freed from this slavery.

You know that everything is as valuable as a price that someone is ready to pay for it. You know how valuable are you? What is a price that someone is ready to pay for you? In Jesus eyes you are so valuable that He gave His life to redeem you. This was not a cheap purchase.

Jesus, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity paid for you with His holy, precious blood, His innocent suffering and His death on the Cross. To redeem you. That is how valuable you are for Him.

If we are so valuable for Him that's not a wonder that He cares for us so much and have prepared for us so much in the future. Jesus didn't pay this price to neglect us, that's why He is faithfully with us, leading and guarding us.

This is of immense significance. Jesus didn't do it so that we can continue to live our life as before. We are not freed to serve ourselves. He is our Lord. Benevolent, gracious, but also almighty, incredibly powerful and just Lord.

We all are under different lords. Some of them are sent by God, as the state government that keeps things in order, punishing evildoers and rewarding those who do good. We may have our bosses in our work. But often we have self chosen lords, which demand from us more and more.

They are things from which we expect to get freedom, dignity, security and meaning for our lives. They may be good things - our work, our family, our career. But if we trust that they will give us what only our Lord Jesus Christ can give us, then we are slipping back into slavery.

When Jesus redeemed us He also explained that He did it so that we may belong to Him; and now we belong to Him. We are made His in the Holy Baptism. He is our Lord. And this is not optional for us to listen to Him or not. He has paid a price. He protects us. We are supposed to live under Him in His kingdom; trusting Him, relying on Him, to serve Him serving others, and rejoicing gladly that we already have a place prepared for us in His eternal kingdom. This is most certainly true.

Let us go to the last person of the Trinity.

What is this?

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

As we mentioned the last Sunday, we often neglect the Holy Spirit, without realizing how crucial our relations with Him are. We may think that we are here because we made such a decision. That we chose to be Christians and to belong to Christ's church.

This confession then serves to us as excellent reminder that by our own understanding and strength we cannot believe that Jesus Christ is our LORD or come to Him. If we think we can, we are not listening what God is telling us. Before He comes and rescues us, we are dead in our sin; we are dead to establish any relationships with Him.

It doesn't mean that we cannot attend the Church, or that we cannot read the Bible, or do other things that children of God do. No, we can chose to do all of these. When apostle Paul wrote that we are dead in our sins before the Holy Spirit rescues us, he meant that there are one relations which we cannot chose on our own. We cannot chose to believe that Jesus Christ is our LORD and come to Him.

Yes, but I said that we can chose to come to the Church. That's right. But these are two different things – to be in a church and - to have faith in Christ, to trust in Him as our Lord, to love Him more than anything, to be ready to do anything only to be together with Him, to obey Him, loving and serving others as Jesus loved and served us.

This is something we cannot do. We want to be lords ourselves. That is what happened with our first parents. Remember, how Satan tempted Adam and Eve: "You will be like gods... ooo!" That is what sin does with us. We are OK to be in some kind of relations with true God, to get some benefits from Him, but we want to retain the last word for us. 'I'll decide what and how to do with my life.'

As long as we want our will to happen and not God's will, as long as we want to live as if we ourselves and all that we have belong to us, instead of realizing that these all are gifts of God, entrusted to us so that we can serve our Lord serving others... as long as this is our thinking, we are in enmity with God, we haven't accepted His lordship, and we don't trust that He, who paid such a price to redeem us, that He would do the best for us.

And we cannot trust and live this way on our own. That's a gift of the Holy Spirit. Remember, the words of God and the Holy Spirit always come together. When we are listening to the words of God, either in the Divine service or in Bible study, the Holy Spirit comes to us, enlightens us, makes us holy and keep us it the true faith. That is His work, not ours. For us it is God's gift.

We cannot trust in God and to love Him as He demands it. That why the Holy Spirit has a lot to do every day. For every day He comes to us and, as Luther said, abundantly forgives us all our sins. All of them. The first of all – the lack of love and trust to our God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

He comes daily and delivers this forgiveness that gives us assurance that we are accepted by our God, that we can come before Him with clear conscience as His children, as His forgiven children.

Thanks to the works of the Holy Spirit we have this assurance. We also have this hope that the same Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead will raise also us and give us eternal life in the presence of our Lord. This is most certainly true.

We could go on and on talking about all that Triune God does for us. In fact, that is exactly what we do every Sunday and every Bible study. We talk about His gifts, about His grace.

So, what are our relations with this God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit? We owe Him. We owe Him everything. We are His. Depending on Him daily. What does He expect? What can we give Him?

As Luther put it: “For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.” We owe Him thanks and praise, service and joyous obedience.

This God has revealed to us His name – the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Apostles’ Creed briefly and eloquently describes what this gracious God have done and continually does for us. That is why we have this creed. So that every day we could remind ourselves - what kind of God we have. What kind of the Lord we have. How much He loves us, how much He cares for us and how much He does for us. Every day.

Every time when we say this creed, we can rejoice for we know that this God is our God, He has created us, redeemed us, called us by His Gospel and He will never, never leave us. This is our God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.