

“ME’ and the Holy Spirit?” John 1:29-42

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." ³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas." (which means Peter).

Today we live in a culture of ‘me’. Everything is told to be about ‘me’ and for ‘me’. It is not difficult to understand why it is so. This is an echo from this primal whisper - “You will be like gods.” So in our hearts we want to believe these lies, and live according to them, especially when our culture has reached such a prosperity.

Even if we are called to be disciples of Christ, to live in renewed relationships with true God, in our hearts we still want to believe and act like *we*, and not God Creator, are in charge of our lives, that *we* by our good lives, and not Jesus, can be our saviours, and also – that *we* by our own power, if only we decide, can become good Christians and to live in communion with God. And surrounding culture literary imposes this ‘me’ - thinking upon us.

How arrogant and self-centred sin can make us, how blind! It shuts our minds, prevents to see the truth, it leaves only narrow opening so that we can focus all our attention to this most important part of reality - ourselves. So that we can be fully concerned with ourselves. “Me”.

We are not immune to this ‘me’ culture here in the Church. Not at all. Quite contrary, the Church has been devastated by this ‘me’ culture. We all suffer from it. How easily we can be tempted to look at ourselves and be pleased about how good Christians we are, especially if we have done something good.

A couple days ago I had a chat with a young man. Really good guy, I like him a lot. I didn't know he considered himself Christian. And what a Christian! Just listen. To quote him, his parents instilled in him good Christian values, I guess he meant good morals.

He doesn't do bad things, he lives Christian life, that's what he said. And on the top of this he added – I know that am a nice person and I don't need this organized religion. Wow... I am a nice person, a Christian! Yes, and he regularly attends youth events here in Barossa, they obviously are not organized.

I don't want to be too harsh on him, for I believe we all are struggling with the same issues. The Church has and still is being devastated by this culture of 'me'. But what kind of gospel such a Christian can bring to others? See, how good I am? Look at my life and my values? Look at 'me'!

Does it sound like the Gospel of Christ or gospel of 'me'? Thanks to this 'gospel of me' we can so often hear comments from our culture: "I'm a better Christian than those in your congregation."

Luckily for us, we have an antidote, we have the Scriptures, that helps us to see the truth about God, this world and us. If only we use them.

Today we heard as John narrated the beginning of Jesus ministry. We'll try to focus on one particular person in John's story, The One who almost always remains in a shadow. He doesn't bother other with presenting Him as a 'nice person'. He is often called a shy member of Trinity.

Can you guess, who is this person? Yes, it is the Holy Spirit. Today we will explore what is the importance of the Holy Spirit in your life.

So, what is the role of the Holy Spirit? We can put it in a very simple way - without the Holy Spirit there are no Christians, and there is no church. We wouldn't be Christians, we wouldn't be here if not the Holy Spirit. That simple.

As Luther explained it in his Small Catechism: "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..."

Sounds so contrary to our cultural mentality, - "I know that I am a nice person", or ... "I believe that on my own I can't even believe, can't even come to Christ, can't keep the faith... but the Holy Spirit does it all for me." These are His gifts, His work.

We all are creation of the Holy Spirit. When He enlightens us with the Gospel, we are freed from focusing on ourselves. We can't do it on our own. That

is what the Holy Spirit does, - He turns our hearts away from 'me' towards Jesus and toward our neighbours.

This is ongoing tag-of-war. Our sin pulls our hearts to look at us, to boast about or to pity ourselves, the Holy Spirit pulls them to look towards Jesus and our neighbour.

Our faith, our trust to God the Father and His Son Jesus, our God given wisdom and understanding, our sacrificial service to others, everything good in our lives are fruits of His work. We would not have done it on our own. But even we as Christians so often want to take a credit for what the Spirit has done through us.

The Holy Spirit works in our lives similarly as He did in Jesus life. From testimonies in the gospels we can see that a clear picture arises – whatever Jesus did, wherever He went, at all stages of His life, at His conception, at His baptism, during His ministry, even in His resurrection, the Holy Spirit was always present and active through Jesus. They both really were as two hands of God, working together and embracing this world, trying to put it back on feet.

Now listen carefully, what Jesus promised before He ascended to the Father. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you *forever*, even the Spirit of truth ... You know him, for he *dwells with you* and *will be in you*." (John 14:16-17).

This is really important! Jesus did everything in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was always with Him, protecting and empowering Him. The Holy Spirit was this bond between the Father and the Son.

Now Jesus promised that He will send the same Spirit to be with us, to dwell with us forever. So that the Spirit can continue His work through us. And He did and continues to do as He promised. How?

He established the Baptism, He gave the Holy Spirit to His apostles and commanded them to forgive our sins, He instituted the Lord's Supper. He sent the Spirit upon the Church on the Pentecost. On top of all, He gave us His Gospel, His words, and these words, as Jesus Himself testified - are spirit and life.

You also received the Holy Spirit in your Baptism. In your baptism you were adopted as a child of the Father, embraced in the fellowship with the Father and the Son, now He says to you: "You are my beloved child." You receive the Spirit every time when you hear the Gospel and meditate upon it, you receive the Spirit in the Holy Communion, when Jesus comes to us. It is given to us in so many ways. As John wrote: For He [The Father] gives the Spirit without measure." (John 3:34)

You see, how generously God the Father is dealing with us. He gives us this another Helper and Comforter, not in one way, but in numerous. Remember, in our Bible studies we have been talking again and again – where is the Church and our faith created and sustained? Yes, here, in the Divine Service and in Bible Studies, when we listen to our Lord, and when His Spirit comes to us.

We can say that the Holy Spirit is like oxygen for our faith. We couldn't live and enjoy this world unless we have oxygen to breath, it keeps us alive. We don't see it, we don't think about it, but it is around us and provides a fitting environments for us, and we couldn't exist without it.

Similarly with the Holy Spirit. We don't see Him, we don't think much about Him, but without Him our faith, our relations with the Father and the Son and also among us as Christians couldn't exist.

No one can enjoy the closest and the most intimate fellowship with God the Father if the Holy Spirit doesn't dwell with you. The Spirit is the One who makes this fellowship possible. He is the One who embraces and binds together the members of Trinity. He binds us together with the Father and the Son and also among ourselves. We are holy people, for we all are embraced by the same Spirit.

We may wonder, - why is God so prodigal giving His Spirit in so many ways? There are at least few reasons. First, He gives us the Spirit all the time, because we need it so desperately. Without the Holy Spirit our faith and our relationships with the Father would die.

Our hearts and our eyes are quick to turn their focus back to – 'me'. Everything again becomes about me. It doesn't mean that we would stop being nice people, no, we can still live our lives as we are shaped by God's word.

But then we'd do it looking at ourselves, because *we* are so nice and loving, and we want to be that way. Then we don't look at our God with gratitude for everything that He daily does for us , and we don't look at our neighbour with compassion, instead we look at how good *we* are living moral lives.

And the worst thing is, that we don't even notice it. This is what happens with everyone who is tricked into 'me' culture. We just happily drift away from God, from His purifying and empowering presence in the Divine Service and Bible Studies, back onto the road that comfortably leads to eternal destruction.

Then our lives gradually become about *us* being nice persons, and then - why would you need God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit? I'm sure you all know many painful examples of this happening among people you love.

That's why we need to receive the Holy Spirit all the time. All the time. We need to keep receiving it. For it is the only way the Father can sustain relationships with us and prevent our spiritual death.

The other reason why God gives His Spirit so abundantly is because He doesn't want to lose us. He doesn't want to lose you. He does not want Satan, sin and our own flesh, so much supported by surrounding culture, to separate us from Him, and to rob you from what He has prepared for you.

Just listen to these words, they are said about you, - "when you heard the truth, the Gospel of your salvation, you "were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of [y]our inheritance until we acquire possession of it." (Eph. 1:13-14) It's about you.

You are sealed with the Holy Spirit. It is given to you as the guarantee of your inheritance in the Kingdom of God. God the Father keeps giving you the Spirit in all the possible ways, so that only you can be safely delivered from the power of Satan and brought into His Kingdom, to receive your inheritance.

That's why He gives His Spirit without measure. For you are so precious in His eyes. Much more precious than you could ever imagine. Do we deserve it? No. Do we know how to appreciate it? No. But our Father still loves us. For this is what kind of God He is.

There is at least one more reason, why God keeps giving us His Spirit. Do you remember, how John knew who Jesus was? The Holy Spirit helped Him to recognize Jesus. The Spirit revealed Jesus' identity. And what was the next thing that John the Baptist did?

He pointed to Jesus. "Behold, the Lamb of God." He immediately shared it with his disciples. Look, this is the One, whom God has sent. He will take away all the sin and He will purify you with the Holy Spirit. This is the Gospel.

And what did His two disciples do right away? As soon as they learn where they can find Jesus, they brought their relatives and friends to him. This is what Andrew said to his brother Peter: "Come, come, we have found the Messiah, the Christ." This is what the Holy Spirit does. He points to Jesus. He brings us to Jesus and He also inspires us to bring others where Jesus is found.

Before Jesus left He Himself promised: "'But when the Helper comes... the Spirit of truth... he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness [about me]..." (John 15:26-27) Dear brothers and sisters, we are so blessed, that the Holy Spirit is continually given to us in so many ways. We truly are.

He keeps us in relations with the Father and the Son, He protects us from all evil, outside, and inside of us, He reveals us who our Lord and Saviour is and brings us into fellowship with Him, and He keeps bearing witness about Jesus.

Let us pray, united in the Holy Spirit, that He would empower us so that we can live and testify not about our goodness, not about how nice Christians we are, but always, always about our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away our sins, and not only ours, but the sin of the world.

That by our words and deeds in the power of the Holy Spirit we can bring others into the fellowship with the Father and the Son, so that they can be blessed as well.

Amen.