

“Fiery and magnificent!” John 14:8-17

“Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” 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’? 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. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

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. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 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.”

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

Every Sunday is special. Every time we remember and celebrate Jesus’ resurrection, the beginning of new creation, every time when our Triune God kindly invites us into His presence to strengthen us, to speak to us, to listen to us, to feed us with His holy meal, every day is very special as we are surrounded by our divine family.

Every Sabbath day is like a wonderful sanctuary in time, where once a week we can escape the storms and calamities of this world. But some Sundays are even more special. And this is one of those. Pentecost. The Sunday when we meditate upon and rejoice in the most amazing gift of the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit with us.

Yes, Jesus did it. He promised that He will do it and He did it. He has sent His Spirit to be with us and to dwell in us. And the very fact that you are here today is a beautiful testimony of our Lord’s faithfulness. For you wouldn’t be here unless the Holy Spirit in you had brought you here, into our Father’s house.

Today I invite you to reflect on three aspects of Christian life, which seem to be really fitting for this great celebration. Let’s reflect on the **grace** of Christian life, on the **challenges** of Christian life and on the **magnificence** of Christian life.

First, **grace**. How do we say in our confession of faith, in Luther’s explanation of the 3rd Article of the Apostles’ Creed? “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” Isn’t this wonderful?! God’s grace in its fullness...

Do we really believe it? I mean with our whole hearts and minds? I don’t know... perhaps there are moments of enlightenment. How often we just take our Christian identity as something given. What a big deal! Yes, that’s who I am, so what?!

How often do we marvel at what efforts it required and still requires from our God to bring us, dead in our sins, rebellious to our very core, ungrateful and unappreciative, from the kingdom of satan into the Kingdom of God’s Son Jesus?

How often do we thank our Father for this undeserved gift, the gift of His Spirit in us, the gift of salvation, and how often we just cruise through our lives feeling quite proud about our goodness as if that was somehow our merit and achievement?

It is amazing what picture we get from the Holy Scriptures, how much our God has done and does for each one of us. For our ears these are just ideas, just a nice sounding story – that our God has chosen you before the foundation of the world. Our fallen reason can't comprehend all the comfort this message contains.

Long before you were conceived your God knew about you. And He has been planning and guiding the flow of history in such a way that not only you were born, but also, that you had the opportunity to hear the Gospel and to receive new life.

How many things needed to happen in a certain way for you today to be here? How many generations needed to follow the 1st Great Commission “be fruitful and multiply”, how many times God's angels had to rush to protect you, shelter you?

How remarkably has the Word of God been received, recorded, kept, copied, translated, distributed, proclaimed... that the message of the Triune God has reached you, across millennia, across the world, across different languages!

How many have devoted and sacrificed their lives in efforts both to keep this message pure and clear, and also to proclaim and teach it? How many people our Triune God has called, prepared and sent so that you could hear His invitation?

And when that finally happened, how thoughtfully He has organized everything that you need to keep this one true faith? How many faithful Christian brothers and sisters He has placed in your life – to teach you, to guide you, to encourage you, to share your burdens, to pray for you, to love and support you?

All of this He has done and does for you out of His sheer grace and goodness. Because the truth is that “we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel... and still every day keep us in the one true faith.”

How admirably determined our God is not to give up on us! The day is coming when it will be revealed how marvellously our Triune God has laboured to bring you into His family! Praise be to Him and may He bless us richly with His Spirit so that we delight to daily meditate upon His undeserved grace and care.

For it brings us such comfort and encouragement and peace as we face the unknown. But such blissful state usually doesn't last. Because we still live in this world.

Challenges of Christian life, that was our second topic. **Challenges.**

How do we see ourselves? How do we see our congregation, our church? We live in this world, and the way of this world, the standards and expectations of this world shape how we see ourselves. I think we could easily fight for the title of the smallest Lutheran congregation in Adelaide.

How does that make you feel? That is not exactly what the world values. It never has. The world desires to make a name for themselves. And the world adores those

who have made a name for themselves. The ancient spirit of Babylon is as alive today as it was back then. What does this world value?

When we manage to build our towers. They may be literal towers, buildings which make us feel tiny and insignificant, and illustrate the power and might and the big names of those who erected them.

Or those may be metaphorical building, where we are if awe of our own achievements, discoveries, abilities to control our environment and tap into the forces of creation. Nothing will be impossible for us... Just give us a bit more time.

Or when we have built our name by some other means... as sport stars, entertainment celebrities, celebrity politicians, social media influencers, fashion trendsetters, cultural elites who try to reshape our society in their own image.

This is what the world loves, this is what the world is attracted to. No one wants to be small and insignificant, and too often we fall into this trap as well; when churches want to compete with the world, being as shiny, as trendy as the world, going with the spirit of times, with what is popular, trying to get their piece from the glory and splendour of the great Babylon.

It is not that hard to understand. I can relate to it. I think there is built into us this longing for glory, for greatness, for significance. Do we experience it in our Christian community? Not much glory, not much of worldly splendour...

But when the Church tries to mimic the world, we only embarrass ourselves, we look funny and shallow, and eventually are despised even more. And all of that happens when we forget who we truly are, about the magnificence of the Church.

So, this is a good time to be reminded of **the magnificence of Christian life**. About how our God Himself speaks about us in the Scripture. And that is something that far supersedes any wonders of fame and earthly glory that fallen humanity could ever achieve. That's our third topic. **Magnificence**.

Do you know what happens with those who spend their lives making a name for themselves? Towers turn into ruins, kingdoms named after them disappear into oblivion, today's fame is forgotten tomorrow. As someone quite wise once wrote: "All this is vanity and a striving after wind." (Ecc 1:14)

But parallel to all those vain efforts there is another building project going on. It has been going on since the very beginning. That building has been growing in grandeur and vastness with every day. The Temple of the Triune God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. You are this temple of God. The Church.

Remember what happened on the Pentecost day? Sure, the giving of the Holy Spirit. But how did the Holy Spirit come to those our brothers and sisters on that day? "Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind.

And it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:2-4) Tongues as of fire...

Now, this is quite remarkable. Do you remember where we have the imagery of fire in the Old Testament? Almost every time when God revealed Himself to His people in the OT times, His revelation was accompanied by ... the imagery of fire.

As Moses put it: "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire." (Deut. 4:24) Now, in Pentecost the tongues of fire rested on Jesus' disciples. What does this mean? That the Holy God had come to fulfil His promise and to dwell with us and in us.

The same Holy Spirit who was hovering above waters in the beginning, the same Spirit who inspired prophets of the old, the same Spirit who accompanied Jesus on His journey among us, the same Spirit who was poured out in Pentecost.

The same Spirit, just as Jesus promised, is now sent to indwell in you. Now "you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." (Eph 2:22) The same Holy Spirit now indwells in you.

Divine presence with you. Divine power in us. The Triune God with us, using us to bring His fiery light into this world and to build His holy Temple, His everlasting abode, His holy city, the Church.

See, regardless how insignificant we may appear in the eyes of this world; we are here talking about most magnificent divine realities. For we have been entrusted the most important mission.

We are not here to fight for the world's attention, or to try to please them, or even to fix the world problems. We are dealing here with sin and forgiveness, with life and death, with eternal judgement and salvation. With eternal realities.

You are called to reign with Jesus, and His reign and our reign has begun already now. You have the keys of heavenly Kingdom, you have the Words of God which are spirit and life, you are carriers of divine glory and power, even if we carry them in these ordinary earthly vessels in this small community of God's people.

You are God's Temple. Magnificent and glorious in His eyes. We can't see the whole building, as it stretches through millennia and reaches to all the corners of the earth. But one day we will see it in its fullness and that building will remain forever. We are only a tiny element in God's temple. A tiny little gemstone.

But how precious you are! As a precious pearl you are precious to the Lord of this Temple, much dearer than all the wealth and fame and towers of the world. So, here we are – little, fiery, precious living stones of God's Temple.

He has placed us here to let God's fire to burn in us, His light to shine in darkness, His embrace to warm those who freeze in this world, His fiery flame to purify everything it touches, and His Spirit of truth to bring unity to all people. Not less...

This is you. Magnificent. Truly magnificent.

So, yes, what a joyful thing it is to reflect on the Spirit of God and what He does for us and through us. For we don't reflect on something we don't know, we reflect on someone who we do know, someone who dwells with us and who Himself enlightens us with His gifts. The Holy Spirit. With you. In you. Forever. Amen.