

“Believe it, you are free!” John 14:15-21

“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. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

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

Do you know what our problem is? Perhaps the most serious one. The one that has an impact on our entire lives? We don't believe in the Gospel. We don't. We sort of do, intellectually. We say we do, and probably we say it with all honesty, from our very hearts that we do, but... we struggle. We all do, no exceptions.

We struggle to believe what the Scripture reveals to us. That God, the God, the Creator of everything that exists, things visible and invisible, that He became one of us. Just like you. With flesh and blood. A human being. That He did it so that you could know Him as your God. You! But why? Because He wants to be your God.

More than that. He did something for you that we can't grasp. We struggle. He took your place in God's judgment. He took upon Himself responsibility for everything that you have ever done wrong, messed up, or failed to do when you knew you should. He took all of that upon Himself.

And now He proclaims the Good News to you: “I have taken away all your sins. Stop feeling guilty! For anything. You are innocent now, I have given to you my innocence, and I don't remember your sins anymore. I don't count them anymore. They are gone. They do not exist anymore, and they don't have power over you.

And I have taken away all your shame. Stop being ashamed of anything, stop being embarrassed! I have covered and clothed you with my holiness. You are good, you are very good, you are radiant and beautiful in my eyes now. This is how I see you.”

We struggle to believe this. Can that be true? Has God really dealt with my every failure, with every foolish and shameful event and action that happened in my life, with all the hurt and harm that I have caused to others? Can that be true?!

We struggle to believe, even as our gracious Lord speaks to us without ceasing, in the Scripture, through your fellow Christians, through your pastors, and so on. He wants to assure you, that this is true, this is what He has done, this is His gift to you, this is the Gospel, the Good News that He proclaims to you.

And you see what it means? You are free, you are free from anything that could burden your conscience, from anything that can rob you of your joy, from anything that would hold you captive of your past. You are free. Jesus has freed you.

He has brought you the sweetest, the most joyful, the most beautiful freedom. Because He has freed you not only from, but – He has also freed you for. Hear this again! Jesus Christ has freed you not only from your sins, guilt, shame, but also for. He has freed you for new life with Him. And His vision for your life is truly amazing.

And this is where we struggle. We often get stuck in that first part. Freed from. We keep focusing on what we have done wrong, Satan keeps reminding us about our most painful failures, and we struggle to rejoice in the new life Jesus has given us.

Sometimes those outside of the Church give us a fair critique. You may have heard them mocking Christians saying that the whole Christian way is about sinning, repenting, receiving forgiveness and then quickly going back to sinning again.

And sometimes that critique hits the mark, there are times when we get stuck in the “freed from” or “saved from” mindset. It is sad when it happens. When we don’t get to rejoice in the fullness of the Gospel, in our God-given freedom.

To live the rhythm of “sinning-being forgiven-back to sinning” is a caricature of what Christian life is about. It could be compared as being imprisoned (by our sin and guilt and shame) and then being freed from that imprisonment, only to go back.

It doesn’t make sense, nevertheless, sometimes we struggle to break that circle. And if that is where we find ourselves, that then taints how we perceive everything in our Christian lives. Then we struggle to embrace or even to understand Jesus’ vision for our lives. We just don’t get it.

In today’s Gospel reading Jesus said: **“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.”** This is part of Jesus’ vision for our new life. How do we hear and see it?

Too often we have that basic and rather negative view on the Commandments as ten “you shall nots”. You shall not do this, and you shall not do that. Is that Jesus’ vision for our new lives? You shall not! If that was true, then, indeed, how boring!

But that is not what the Commandments are about, and that is not what Jesus is telling us. Dr Luther in his Small Catechism so clearly describes that the Commandments are not simply about not doing something that is wrong.

They are about doing what is right. We can put it this way – the Commandments summarize in a very brief way what God’s good and wise design for our lives is. What we are created to be and to do, what it means to be fully human and to flourish living in relationships with the Triune God and with one another.

And when Jesus says that we will keep His Commandments, He probably means even more, everything that He has spoken to us. That we will cherish His word, will meditate upon it, that we will strive to embrace the new life He has freed us for.

That we will try to live out our God given identity wherever our good Lord has placed us. What a vision it is! God the Father has made us His children, so that we would imitate His true Son Jesus Christ in our lives. What would that look like?

That we would live in close and intimate fellowship with God the Father, being loved and embraced by Him, always listening to Him, striving to do His will, to bring Him joy, to ask for His advice, to pray for His guidance, to praise His goodness and generosity, to seek His help and shelter...

... to rest in His presence in His house, to honour authorities, to cherish and support our neighbours, to keep ourselves chaste and holy, to strive to be generous, speak truthfully, encourage others and build them up, leading a grateful and joyful life.

And this is also true for all our other relationships, for all our callings; when we strive to live according to God's wisdom as children to our parents, as siblings, as spouses, as parents to our children, as students, employees, employers, citizens, members of congregations, friends and neighbours, etc.

Jesus has a beautiful vision for our lives in every relationship. In each one of them we shall ask: "Gracious Father, show me what is Your good will and wisdom for this calling? How shall I serve those people? How shall I pray for them? How shall I support them in a God pleasing way and how can I bring them closer to Jesus? How can you bless them through me? How can I help them to be a blessing to others?"

That's Jesus' vision for your life! Rich, full, adventurous, saturated with challenges and joys. This is what Jesus has freed you for. When we believe the Gospel, when we truly believe, we can delight in this rich vision for our new life, for we don't see it anymore as some burdensome chore – "keep my commandments!" – we see it as it is – as a beautiful gift, as an incredible opportunity.

Similarly, think about "The Way of Life" materials. That is not something we have to do, that is not one more burden to carry, that is our God's beautiful vision for our lives as His people. Rich, exciting, attractive vision. Jesus freed us to live that way.

And of course, we still live in this broken world, and the old Adam is very much alive in us, and the enemy never sleeps, but waits for opportunities to push us down. That's why our Lord blesses us with the gift of confession and absolution.

When we believe the Gospel, we see even them differently. Sometimes even Christians from different traditions ask: "Why do you need this every week? You heard it once – you are forgiven! – that should be enough. Or do you need to put yourself down reminding that you are sinners? Sounds miserable!"

Confession and absolution are wonderful gifts, they are tools of our God. Yes, we are forgiven, but sin still dwells in our bodies. It is like a sickness, like a virus, it impacts everything – our bodies, our souls, our intellects, our imagination, our emotions, our wills, our abilities. Sure, we know that we are forgiven, but we also want the Holy Spirit to help us to see our sinfulness, our hidden sins...

... “the secret thoughts and desires which I cannot fully know or understand.” We need God’s help to push back against them, so that we are not captives of our sinful condition, but can more fully rejoice in the freedom that Jesus has given to us.

And the words of forgiveness are not simply information. They are Spirit and life. Because they are words of our Triune God; full of new life-giving power. When He speaks to us, He not just declares you forgiven and free, He creates new hearts in you, He restores and reshapes you, He helps you to be who He designed you to be.

And then we are asked: “Do you intend, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live as in God’s presence, and to strive daily to lead a holy life, even as Christ has made you holy?” Yes, we do! This is about Jesus’ vision for our new lives.

Are we ready to embrace our freedom, do we intend to live it out as fully as possible? Yes, yes, please, help us, Lord! And help us He does. Just listen to the wonderful promises of Jesus, for they have already come true in your life.

“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. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you ... you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” Amazing, amazing promises!

Please, note! You are here, and you have been freed for this new life, because Jesus has sent you another Helper, the Spirit of truth. And You do know Him, for He already dwells with you and in you. Otherwise, you wouldn’t be here, otherwise you wouldn’t be interested either in Jesus or in this new life that He has given you.

And there is more, it is not only the Holy Spirit who dwells in you, the whole Trinity has embraced you. Jesus reveals to us this amazing reality of what it means to be a Christian; it is not simply about a set of beliefs, it is about the Triune God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit inviting and embracing you in this divine fellowship with them and with all their chosen saints. One divine, everlasting fellowship!

O! If only our eyes could see this magnificent reality. One day, one day... But for now, dear brothers and sisters, I pray that you would believe, that you are able to believe, that the Holy Spirit fills you, transforms you, convinces you, assures you that you are free, free from every sin, from guilt and shame, that you are innocent and glorious in God’s eyes, so that now you could joyfully focus living your new life with Jesus.

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father.” He says it about you. Yes, you! Amen.