

Romans 6:1-11
“United in Death and Life”
The Baptism of Our Lord

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First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
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Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Suddenly, John appears out in the wilderness by the Jordan River, clothed in camel’s hair and wearing a leather belt around his waist. He spends all of his time in that desolate place preaching to the people. As he preaches repentance, more and more people come. These people keep coming and coming. As they come to John, he baptizes each person, one by one.

This great multitude of people kept coming to John. This multitude came to hear God’s Word and turn to God for repentance to receive forgiveness of sins. These people came to find relief from guilt and shame. They came to receive God’s grace.

But there was an exception. Among this great multitude stood Jesus of Nazareth. He was the only one among the multitudes of people who did not come to John in need of forgiveness of sins. Jesus was the only person who ever lived who did not need to repent.

Yet, Jesus was there, and when His turn came to be baptized by John, John was shocked. You see, John knew that Jesus was the man he spoke of when he preached, **“After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stop down and untie”** (Mark 1:7).

So, why is Jesus there? What is the purpose of His baptism? If He isn’t there to repent of His sins and receive forgiveness, why is He desiring to be baptized by John? He wasn’t being baptized for Himself, Jesus was being baptized for you!

[The Significance of Christ's Baptism for Us]

As uncertain as life may seem to be these days, God's love for you is certain. God's love for you never changes. So, what does Christ's baptism mean for you? It means everything!

Today in the Epistle lesson, the Holy Spirit inspires the Apostle Paul to speak about how we are united to Christ through our baptism. Paul makes it certain that in baptism, God unites us with Christ.

Now to say that baptism unites us to Christ is to say that prior to our baptism, we were not united with Christ. In fact, we were disconnected from God altogether. In fact, this may even be an understatement. You see in Ephesians 2, Paul describes our condition prior to Christ as being "*children of wrath.*" He says: "*We all once lived in the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body, and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*" (Ephesians 2:3).

So, through our very nature – *as we were conceived and born* – we are under the wrath of God because of our sin. In our sin, we have proven that we still live as if our life is disconnected from God. Instead of loving God and our neighbor, we may gossip, spread false rumors, or judge others without proper authority. We focus on our wants and desires, rather than caring for our neighbor.

Likewise, our culture has convinced many of us to believe that sex outside the bounds of marriage is fine. Many may say: "Why not? It's promoted in television and movies, so it must be fine. After all, we'll probably get married someday." Our lives are so dominated by what we see portrayed in television and movies. So, to say that we were disconnected from God by our nature is an understatement.

Fortunately, God is at work in baptism to unite us to Christ.

First, God unites us to Christ's death in and through baptism. Paul tells us, "*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death*" (Romans 6:3-4).

In fact, we are so closely united with Christ's death in our baptism, that it is as if when the water flows over us and we hear the name of God pronounced over us that we are traveling back to nearly 2,000 years ago.

At our baptism, we are there with Christ at His baptism in the Jordan River as He takes upon Himself our sin. We are in fact nailed to the cross with Him as He died for our sins on that Good Friday. We are there with Christ inside that sealed tomb. This is what happened when you were baptized and what happens each time you witness a baptism. You see, we are indeed united to the death of Christ.

But like Christ, we do not remain dead in the tomb. In Baptism, just as we are buried with Christ, we are also raised from the dead with Christ to new life! Paul informs us saying, ***"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life"*** (Romans 6:4).

So, through our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, God the Father sees us the same way He sees His own Son. He says to you: ***"With you I am well pleased."***

For everyone baptized into Christ, this newness of life is what we are walking in right now. This is our sanctified, or holy, life as we grow in the Christian faith. This is not something we have to wait for in our physical death to experience. We have this new life now through God's action in our lives that we received through our baptism.

[The New Life]

At one time, we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Now, God has raised us to new life in and through baptism. In this new life, we no longer live for ourselves, but we live for Christ, who reconciled us to God the Father once again. In this new life, we no longer live to our sinful desires, but rather, we live to please our gracious God.

This is what Paul means when he tells us: ***"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus"*** (Romans 6:11). When we are dead to something, you don't respond to it. You are dead and a dead person cannot respond to anyone or anything. As Paul says, ***"Consider yourselves dead to sin,"*** this is our new life.

Our text begins with this question from Paul: ***“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”*** (Romans 6:1)

“By no means!” says Paul, this is not the life of a Christian! This is not the life of one united in baptism with Christ.

For some, they may believe that since Christ has given us His grace and favor, Christians can sin all the more. After all, Christ will forgive my sin, right? So, should we sin in abundance so that God can forgive us even more frequently?

This would be like asking, “Should I set my house on fire so that the fire department can get more practice at putting out house fires?” Or: “Should I crash my car into a tree so that first responders can get more practice in responding to accidents?”

But at the same time, we know that we will not be free from sin on this side of heaven. We are still going to sin, even as we walk in this newness of life. The difference is that we don’t intentionally sin. As Baptized believers in Christ, we don’t live in our sin. Instead, we repent of our sin daily. You see, no matter the sin, through repentance, that sin is forgiven. That sin is wiped clean! This is our daily life as a Christian. In this new life, we live a life of repentance.

Martin Luther once said, “Our sin is forgiven not so that we may continue in it, but that we might break loose from it; otherwise, it would be called a permission and not a remission of sin.”

So, we live our lives in the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. We walk in this newness of life in repentance that God gave us in our baptism.

And, each time, we repent and confess our sins to God the Father, He again sees us as He saw us in our baptism: ***“With you I am well pleased.”***

Since we live in God’s grace, we walk in the newness of life as we repent and confess our sins.

[Our Union has Future Blessings]

Now, our new life does not end when our life here on earth comes to a close. You see, our union with Christ in our baptism has future blessings for us and all Christians, as well.

Paul says, ***“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his”*** (Romans 6:5). You see, there is more to come!

So, just as Christ was bodily raised from the dead, we too, will be bodily raised from the dead!

This is the sure and certain hope that we all have since we are united with Christ. You see, death is not the end. Death does not have the final say. You see, the power of death was defeated through Christ’s death on the cross and in His resurrection from the dead. This we now share in Christ through our baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection. Death is now but a gateway to heaven to be in the presence of God and with all who have gone before us and after us in the faith.

Today, we await the return of Christ with those who have gone before us who are now in the presence of the Lord. Now, Christ will not return in humility as he came to be with us during His first coming. When He comes again, He will come in all power, glory, and majesty.

On that day, our bodies will be raised, just like His body was raised. On that day, our bodies will be changed to be like His glorious body. Our bodies will no longer suffer any of the effects of sin. Our bodies will be perfect and immortal.

When Christ returns, we will be as we are today, that through His baptism and our baptism into Christ, we are united with Him in His death and life. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠