

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 20, 2014 – Romans 6:1-11

¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

In our sermons and classes we often use the term “the Means of Grace.” By this term we mean those vessels through which God offers, gives and seals to us his gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. The Means of Grace as we know them from Scripture are the Gospel in the Word and two sacraments.

We regularly use the Word of God and the communicant members are encouraged to partake of Holy Communion on a regular basis. But what about baptism? When a child is baptized the godparents are encouraged to “remind the child of his/her baptism.” This is more than just reminding the child that he/she has been baptized. Our text this morning reminds us that we are to use our baptism today and every day.

I am sure everyone here can tell me his/her birthday. You probably know the birthdates of others as well. But what about your baptismal date? Why or why not? Is the day not important to you? It should be the most important day of your life – even more important than your birthday because Scripture says, “**Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.**” On the basis of our text this morning let each of us answer this question:

HOW MUCH DOES YOUR BAPTISM MEAN TO YOU TODAY?

I. BAPTISM CONVEYS GOD'S VITAL BLESSINGS TO US.

ONE OF THE BLOODIEST BATTLEFIELDS IS THE BAPTISMAL FONT.

We can say that because God is at work in Holy Baptism. It is God himself who raises the sword. He charges the enemy, tramples Satan underfoot, and drowns the Old Adam in us. He rescues us from sin, death, guilt and impending damnation in hell.

Paul says: “**All of us who were baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.**” You were brought to the font for execution. It was a true “mercy killing.” Martin Luther said, “Drown and kill me, dear Lord, because I would gladly be dead to sin and be buried with your Son, so that by your grace and mercy I might live with him eternally.” Paul here pictures the power of Baptism. This works the death of Christ in us. We are “**buried**,” that is, through his death he took our sins with him to the grave and left them there when he rose. They remain there in the grave for those baptized in his name.

Paul goes on: “**We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**” Through baptism we died spiritually to sin. But that is not all – death is not the end. Christ leads us out of death to life. Our faith is certain that we shall rise and live forever just as he rose from the dead. Since we have been buried and planted with Christ, sin's rule over us is finished.

SCRIPTURE TEACHES THAT BAPTISM IS A SAVING ACT OF GOD.

We have been “**united with him,**” Paul says. Baptism is truly a matter of life and death. Mark 16:16: “**Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.**” 1 Peter 3:21: “**Baptism that now saves you also...the pledge of a good conscience toward God.**” “Saves” not because of a little “bath” but because of a good conscience. When do we have that “good conscience?” When we have faith in Christ’s forgiveness. Baptism saves because it works saving faith. This is a vital blessing God conveys in his sacrament.

Paul goes on: “**8Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.**” Our baptism takes the bitterness and terror out of physical death. It turns it into a sugar-coated death, a soft sleep, which will carry us to the shores of heaven. Why, then, do we still find ourselves trembling at the thought of dying? The “**spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**” Our poor, miserable flesh can’t grasp this fact. It cannot penetrate the mask of death. It sees men falling over, being carried to the morgue, shoved into a hearse, lowered in the ground. Our reason leads us to scream like a child scared when seeing an ugly face! Our fleshly reason is like the pathetic mental patient who thinks the attendants are trying to drown him when putting him to bed. The fault is with our stupid flesh! It is unable to understand the meaning of a Christian death.

According to the New Man we can say, “Death is the gate of heaven, the grave is merely a cradle where I will enjoy the sweetest sleep on the eve of Judgment Day.” It is hard to get the “flesh” to understand! Paul tells us: (Galatians 5:17) “**The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit...**” There is a daily battle and argument raging. This remains through all of our life.

Think of this illustration of change. Have you ever visited a recycling center? Our son took his old steel bathtub to one and they gave him \$42. His neighbor took his old aluminum siding there and he got @ \$200. What are they doing with that “useless” stuff? They compact it with heat and pressure. They melt it down and strip it of all its impurities. They roll it into new steel or aluminum. The old has become new. That is exactly what our God does in holy baptism. He removes the impurities of sin. He washes them away and creates a new person. All of this he does by his own power, the power of the Holy Spirit. All of God’s blessings are conveyed to us for our blessing now and eternally!

II. BAPTISM OCCUPIES A VITAL PLACE IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

HOW SHOULD WE LIVE TODAY, TOMORROW AND EVERY DAY?

In our Lutheran Confessions we read: “The Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism once begun and every day to be continued.” Paul said it this way, (Romans 5:20) “**Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.**” Should we sin more every day? Of course not! That’s not what Paul is saying. He shows God’s great wrath against sin and how powerful his grace must be to remove it. It is like saying, “A burning thirst needs a big glass of water.” Or, “A serious illness needs a medicine stronger than the illness to overcome it.” We don’t say, “Oh, let’s become as sick as possible so that the medicine will become stronger!” It doesn’t follow that we should heap up sins in order to have more forgiving grace. (Luther)

Paul goes on: “**6For we know that our old self was crucified with him so ... that we should no longer be slaves to sin.**” If we are dead to sin how can we live in sin? Remember that you were baptized. Remember that your were brought to the front of the church to be drowned and to die so that your life from that moment on might be one of daily dying to sin, drowning the Old Adam, of unmercifully crucifying the flesh with its wicked desires.

WE NEED TO HEAR THESE ADMONITIONS.

Our Old Adam is like a prodigal son. We want to leave our father's house and spend life in wickedness. The Old Adam is an easy prey for the devil. We are in constant danger of losing salvation. Satan desires to sift us as wheat. Daily we remember the covenant of baptism in which we have renounced the devil and promised faithfulness to our Savior.

Are you experiencing illness in your life? In your illness return to your baptism. Let down your empty bucket into that deep well of his comfort. Refresh yourself with the certainty that through baptism God has adopted you as his child and secured a special mansion in heaven for you.

Do you enjoying reasonable good health right now? In vigor return daily to your baptism. Recall that you are a new creature in Christ and that you ought to use your gifts faithfully as servants of righteousness.

Are you plagued with a guilty conscience? Return to your baptism! Remember that when you were baptized all your sins were drowned, crucified, buried and damned with Christ. He won the decisive victory over Satan, and he gave it to you in your baptism.

Baptism -- That death-dealing, life-giving sacrament. It conveys God's vital blessings to you. It occupies a vital place in your daily life. Think about your baptism. Dress up in your baptism. Walk in it. Live and die in it and you will live forever! Amen.

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