

Sermon for January 14, 2018 – Epiphany 2

Romans 6:1-4 (EHV)

Theme: Because of God's work in Baptism

- 1) We've died to sin;
- 2) We've been raised to live a new life.

¹ What shall we say then? Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase? ² Absolutely not! We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.

Introduction

Just this past week, I had an interesting conversation with a man who lives in Green Bay. He told me that he doesn't believe in infant baptism. Why not? Because most of the people he knows who were baptized as infants are not, what he would call, "dedicated Christians" who truly give themselves over to Christ. "If infant baptism truly saved, wouldn't we see it in the lives of those who were baptized as infants?"

Aside from the fact that I could point to many fine Christians who were baptized as infants, as well as many charlatans who claimed to have dedicated themselves to Christ later in life, there is a grain of truth in his observation: many baptized people live no differently than those who aren't Christian. Does this mean that their baptism was of no effect? No, what it means, rather, is that these baptized people don't understand the true value their baptism has for their daily lives.

And this leads me to ask the question: do you understand the meaning and value your baptism has for your daily life? It is important that you do. Why? Because the encouragement and hope God offers through this blessed sacrament is a great source of comfort and guidance in life. With St. Paul as our guide, let us consider these truths, under the theme: **Because of God's work in Baptism** 1) We've died to sin; 2) We've been raised to live a new life.

Part One: Because of God's Work in Baptism, we've died to sin.

Our sermon text follows right on the heels of Paul making an amazing statement about God's grace. Even though sin increased after God gave his law, God's grace in forgiving sin increased all the more – revealing the LORD's mercy in a most glorious way.

Think of it this way: forgiving a \$1 debt isn't all that great, but forgiving a \$100 debt may impress some of your friends. Forgiving a \$1000 debt may not make the local news, but forgive billions of dollars of debt, and people would speak of your kindness and generosity all the world over.

The glory of God's grace sort of works on the same principle: the more sins he forgives for Christ's sake, the brighter his mercy shines – encouraging more people to repent and believe in him for eternal salvation.

Because God has shown us such great mercy in Christ, the apostle Paul asks: *What shall we say then?* (That is to say, what will our attitude be in response to God's wonderful grace?) *Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase?*

Who in their right mind would purposely sin in order that the glory of God's forgiving love might shine all the more brightly! That would be like me saying to my parents, who paid off my seminary debt: "Wait, Mom and Dad: let me waste more money so that your wonderful act of paying off my school debt might appear even more special than before." Is this the proper way to thank and praise the one who showed us such great love? *Absolutely not!*

And yet, here is the sad truth: we often act as if God's grace gives us a license to sin. All too often I have heard someone tell me something to the effect: "Pastor, I know what I am doing is wrong, but my situation is such that I just can't give it up. God will forgive me." Worse yet, all too often I have acted as if I had said these things myself!

But is this right? Did Jesus die on the cross for our forgiveness so that we can live however we want – trusting that God is so absolutely gracious that he will forgive us regardless of what we do?

Absolutely not! We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

When Jesus went to the cross, he carried our sins – so much so that when God the Father looked at His Son, he saw us and punished Jesus as if he were punishing us. When Christ died, we all died. More than that, when Christ rose, we all rose with him – freeing us from the consequences our sins had earned.

We died to sin. Or to say it another way, sin is dead to us. How so? Because the Holy Spirit has so closely clothed us with Jesus at our baptism that, what is true of Christ is true of us. Christ died to sin, therefore so did we. We are free.

If this is true, how could we want to go on living in it any longer? That makes about as much sense as a person freed from a North Korean prison camp wanting to do the very same things that got him imprisoned in the first place! It makes no sense. It goes against the very core of who we are: that is to say, of who God declared us to be at our baptisms.

And who did God declare us to be at our baptisms? His dearly loved sons and daughters, as the Bible says: *In fact, you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Indeed, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*ⁱ

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, consider the wonderful thing God accomplished for you at your baptism: he clothed you with Christ – connecting you to the benefits of his death by creating faith in your hearts; he freed you from your slavery to sin; he declared you to be his dearly loved and holy child. This is who you truly are. Because of God’s work in Baptism, you are dead to sin. More than that, you have been raised to live a new life, as the last verse of our text indicates:

Part Two: Because of God’s work in baptism, we’ve been raised to live a new life.

We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.

When Jesus died, he died as the worst sinner that ever lived. Why? Not because he sinned, but because he was carrying our sins. Jesus died and was buried in weakness, but he rose in power and glory – free from all sin. He rose a new person – as someone who would never have to bear God’s wrath and anger over sin again. God the Father raised His Son from the dead - free to live a new life – all to the glory of his saving name.

And what God did for Jesus, he also accomplished for all who have been baptized. How so? Because baptism connects us to Christ – washing away and burying our sins to such a degree that they can never rise to haunt us again. And just as Christ rose from his tomb a new person, so we came away from our baptisms with a new man resurrected in our hearts: a new attitude that wants to serve the LORD instead of sin against him. We are a new creation: the old is gone, and the new has come!ⁱⁱⁱ

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul summarized what a baptized Christian's new attitude is by writing: *I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Yes, God gave us the wonderful sacrament of Baptism for a purpose: not as an excuse to continue living in sin, but as an escape from it. Through baptism we died to sin and have been raised to walk in a new life.

“But,” someone might say, “you have not answered the initial problem the man brought up with you. His point was that a lot of baptized people don’t live as if they’re dead to sin. Rather, they seem to view their baptisms as some sort of “get out of hell free” card which allows them to continue living however they want. If this is the case, how can you say that baptism changes a person?”

The problem is not with baptism, but with the false understanding and misuse of this wonderful gift. Let me explain by means of an illustration. Imagine a troubled teen – who got himself into a lot of trouble by using and selling drugs - gets adopted by a very wealthy family. They offer him a new life – willing to pay for his education at the best schools, so he can become someone great. But what does this teen do? He goes back to doing drugs – relying on his new “gullible” parents to bail him out when needed.

Let me ask you: does the fact that this ungrateful teen decided to return to his wicked lifestyle show that his adoption was meaningless: that his new parents didn’t really do anything for him? Absolutely not! By means of his adoption, his new parents provided him with opportunities he would have never had. They gave him a new life, but he rejected it for the old! And this, brothers and sisters in Christ, is exactly what happens when a person decides to abuse the great adoption God gave us in baptism to pursue sin. The fact that they are pursuing sin does not show the ineffectiveness of baptism. It shows, rather, the ignorance and ingratitude of the person who loves sin more than God.

But to those who accept baptism in faith – believing that through it their sins are forgiven and they have been raised to live a new spiritual life - oh, what purpose, and freedom do they receive from this blessed sacrament. They are given the reason and power to say no to the devil when he tempts them. They are enabled – even now – to live a holy life of love – all to the glory of God for the salvation He won for us in Christ.

“But,” someone might say, “I have been baptized. I love God and still struggle with sin. Why is this? Was there something wrong with my baptism?” No, what it means, rather, is that you still live on this evil earth. In the very next chapter after our sermon text, the great apostle Paul laments that he still struggles with sin, and often finds himself losing. Why? Because he still has a sinful nature that will tempt and corrupt him until the day he dies.

We all have such a nature, against which we all must struggle until the day we die. And it is exactly for this reason that we can take daily comfort in our baptisms. How so? As Luther explains in his small Catechism, Baptism means that we can go to our heavenly Father – confessing all our struggles and sins to him in genuine remorse – trusting that he will forgive us for Christ’s sake. And do you know what? He does forgive us – reminding us of how he adopted us as his dearly loved, children for Christ’s sake. We are holy and new. And because this is who we are in Christ, we want to live as God’s dearly love children – looking to the Holy Spirit who was given at our baptisms for guidance and help, as he instructs us through God’s Word.

Yes, the man I was talking to had it all wrong. He relied on his own strength to please God – thinking that baptism is nothing more than his dedicating himself to God. The truth is that, through baptism, God dedicates himself to us – giving us every tool necessary for our daily battle with the devil – the foremost of which is the Holy Spirit himself.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: understand the wonderful blessings God has given you in the sacrament of Baptism, and use them daily in your struggle against sin. Through baptism you've died to sin. Through Baptism, you've been raised to live a new life.

Live, therefore in this new life – praising God for adopting you into his family. When temptation comes your way, remember who you are in Christ: who God declared you to be at your baptism and shun sin. But if you do sin, then remember this: *we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* ² *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.*^{iv} Amen.

ⁱ Galatians 3:26-27 EHV

ⁱⁱ Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:17.

ⁱⁱⁱ Galatians 2:20 EHV

^{iv} 1 John 2:1-2 EHV