

## The Power of Baptism and our union with Jesus Christ

- Pray closing with, "... in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen."
- Week 3 post-quarantine. Still doing well.
- This morning I'd like to highlight a couple things from our Romans 6 reading:
  - Thing 1. Like all sacraments, Baptism is an important and powerful sacrament.
  - Thing 2. Through our baptism we are immersed into a deeper reality: We are united to Jesus Christ even as he is united to us.
  - And as a result (Thing 3), we are given power to say no to sin.
- To get to these three points, though, I want to begin with Paul's question at the beginning of our reading: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"
- Why would Paul begin with this question?
  - Well, in typical Sunday morning fashion, it is helpful to know the passage just before this to understand why.
- In that passage he tells us about the nature of the grace given by God through Jesus Christ.
  - What Paul says is that God's grace abounds.
    - flourishes.
    - It grows in ever increasing fashion.
    - It super-abounds
  - In Jesus Christ, God's response to sin is greater than the power and presence of sin.
  - Even in the face of the ever-increasing presence of sin, we see God's superabundant response in Jesus Christ.
  - "Where sin increased," Paul says, "grace abounded all the more."
  - To such a statement, Paul's question easily follows. "Well if increased sin gives greater and great opportunity for grace, why not just sin more? More grace will follow!"

- “Let us eat drink and be merry (party like its 1999 or 2025 or Thursday) for tomorrow God’s grace will cover it all!”
- To that question Paul says, “Poppycock!”
  - Well, actually he says, “By no means!”
- And so Romans 6 and 7 in many ways are Paul explaining why sinning more does not mean more grace.
  - In a word, he tells us that more Sin means more slavery.
    - More sin means more death.
- So, Paul begins answering his own question – “Can’t we just keep on sinning, because then grace will abound more?” – by reminding his readers what we are as Christians.
  - He tells them this cannot be so because of a simple yet profound reality: Christians have died to sin.
  - How does Paul know that they have died to sin?
    - Because they have been baptized into Jesus Christ.
  - And because Christ has died to sin, Christians baptized into Christ, have likewise died to sin.
  - Why would they go on living under the power of something that they have been freed from in Jesus?
- And you see the three points I want to tease out: baptism is powerful. In it we are united with Christ. Through this things, we can say no sin.
  - The first is the nature of baptism: why it so important.
  - The second is the larger vision that is behind much of Paul’s writing: Christians are so united to Christ such that the events in Jesus’ life become the events of our life – as if they happened to us.
    - And in some mysterious way the reverse: The events of the Christian’s life are somehow caught up into Christ.
    - Our union with Christ and Christ’s union with us is a profound.
  - Through these, we have power to say no to sin.
- So, first a word about baptism and why it is so important.

- Since the first day of the Church – Pentecost – baptism has been the beginning of the life of the faithful in new life in Jesus Christ.
  - When Peter preaches the Church’s first sermon on Pentecost, and his hearers are cut to the heart by the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection,
  - They ask, “What shall we do?”
  - And Peter replies, “Repent and be baptized, everyone of you.”
  - In repentance, in baptism, we are grafted into the life of Jesus’ body, the Church.
  - And our life in Christ begins.
- Our baptism service still reflects that same reality:
  - The baptismal candidates declare their repentance by renouncing the world, the flesh and the devil.
  - And the baptismal candidates declare their allegiance to Christ, accepting him as Lord and Savior.
  - “Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body, the Church.”
- “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to” the sacramental life and the whole life of Christ. (RCC 1213)
- In the Sacrament of baptism we receive the “washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Spirit.” (RCC 1215).
- Gregory Nazianzus beautifully puts it this way,
  - “Baptism is God’s most beautiful and magnificent gift .... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called *gift* because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; *grace* since it is given even to the guilty; ... *anointing* for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; *enlightenment* because it radiates light; *clothing* since it veils our shame; *bath* because it washes; and *seal* as it is our guard and the sign of God’s Lordship.” (RCC 1216)
- The power of baptism of our cannot be overstated.

- Listen again to how Paul speaks of baptism in Romans 6:

- “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, 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.”

- We are buried with Jesus in baptism.
- We are raised to new life in Jesus in baptism.
- And not just ordinary life (in as much as life is ordinary)
- BUT we are raised to resurrection life: begun in baptism now, as a pledge that it will be granted fully and irrevocably at Christ’s second coming.
- (Best seen in the plunging under and lifting up on emerging baptism. But all baptism with water in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is actual and real baptism.)

- In baptism we are united to Christ, Christ is united to us and we are united to Christ’s Church.
- And that leads the second point I want to draw out:
  - Christians are so united to Christ that the events in Jesus’ life become the events of our life as if they happened to us.
  - And in some mysterious way the reverse: The events of the Christian’s life are somehow caught up into Christ.
    - It is a profound union.
- Again, Paul’s language here and many other places is startling:
  - Because Jesus suffered, we suffer.
  - Because Jesus dies. We die.
  - Because he is raised from the dead, we are raised to new life. (Our true resurrection is yet to come.)
  - Because he ascends into heaven, we ascend with him and are seated with him in glory.
    - Paul emphasizes these realities especially in Colossians and Ephesians: We are seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

- And even more startling, the reserve is true: what happens in our life gets caught up into his.
  - Paul first learned this, I think, on the road to Damascus.
  - Paul – Saul at the time – was on his way to imprison Christians for being Christians and Jesus appears to him and says,
  - “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”
  - Saul was persecuting Christians, yet Jesus says, “No Saul, you are persecuting me.”
- Jesus’ connection to his disciples is seen in the same way in Matthew 25: When did the righteous feed, cloth, visit and care for Christ, “Whenever you did it to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”
  - Christ is sacramentally present to his disciples, especially in as they minister to the weakest, the lowest, the poorest and the neediest.
- In Jesus Christ, God has chosen to identify with us.
  - In Jesus Christ, God become human.
  - And now we have the privilege of becoming like him (sharing his divine nature as Peter will say it.)
  - What is true of Jesus is becoming true of us.
  - He who was rich, because poor so that we who are poor might become rich.
- And this leads us to the third point: the admonition of Paul here in Romans 6 is that since Christ has died and we with him and since Christ has been raised and we with him
  - then through our connection to him – begun in baptism – we are given the power to longer be captive to sin.
  - We can say no to sin.
  - It no longer has the same power over us that it once did.
  - (What is a good example of what once had power, but does no longer? Maybe the example of my father’s anger and the car keys?)
- I want to remind you that sin is not our friend.

- Sin has similar ambitions to the thief of John 10: he desires to “kill and steal and destroy” the sheep.
- Sin has similar desires described in a prayer asking for help from St. Michael the great archangel in Revelation 12, “By the power of God, thrust Satan down to Hell and with him those other wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls.”
- The work of the enemy is to tempt people to sin that it might ruin their souls.
- So, Paul is simply pointing out a piece of insane, ridiculous logic: “Maybe I should sin more, so that grace can abound more!”
  - What? And create ruination and destruction!? God forbid!
- In Christ and in our connection to Christ through repentance and through baptism, Paul says we have real power.
  - We have power to say no to sin.
- Thing 1. Baptism is an important and powerful sacrament.
- Thing 2. Through our baptism we touch on a deeper reality: We are united to Jesus Christ even as he is united to us.
- Thing 3. And as a result, we are given power to say no to sin.
- So, I’m going to close by voicing a question you may have running through your mind, “If God has given us the power to say no to sin, why is it so hard for me to say no to sin?”
  - I’m not going to try and answer that question now, but simply want to encourage you.
  - In Jesus Christ, in his cross and resurrection, lay the power of God.
  - You have been grafted into him through faith and baptism.
  - If you ask, he will teach you how to recognize the sin of our life.
  - If you ask, he will give you the power to say no.
  - If you ask, he will show you how you are forgiven.
  - If you ask, he will give you the power to forgive yourself.
- Close in prayer.