

+ Pentecost 6 + Sermon preached at Saint Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church (WELS)
Tomah, Wisconsin on July 16, 2017. Pastor Curt S. Backhaus.

Romans 6:1-11 | EHV

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

For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, to make our sinful body powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin. For the person who has died has been declared free from sin.

And since we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he will never die again. Death no longer has control over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once and for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way also consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Dead and alive!

When it comes to baptism, it's an all-too common mistake.

Loving, doting parents bring their son or daughter to the font and someone in the congregation is bound to smile and think, "How sweet; what a precious child!" They might even congratulate the parents for dedicating their baby to Christ and promising to give the child a Christian upbringing --as though baptism were all about the innocence of a little baby and the good intentions of the parents.

Or, when an adult is baptized, someone might say, "How wonderful --someone so late in the game giving their life to Jesus," as though baptism were what we do instead of what God does.

Neither, however, is true to what God says about baptism in his Holy Word. Baptism is God's work, not man's work. Baptism, if anything, is more like a funeral. A person that is by nature dead in sin is then buried --buried with Christ and therefore now dead to sin and dead to the power of Satan.

Isn't that what the Apostle Paul says in our text? He doesn't just say that Christ died for us or that Christ died in place of us (both of those statements are gospel truth); rather he says, "We died with Christ." And for each one of you your death and burial took place at this funeral we call Holy Baptism.

Now I admit that thinking of baptism as a funeral is kind of odd; it even sounds morbid, doesn't it? But not when you consider the deceased. Consider what you once were. Every last one of us came into this world "dead in our trespasses and sins" --turned away from God, enemies of God, dead to God; "sinful from the time my mother conceived me" is

how the psalmist describes you and me. As far as God was concerned, before he made you or me the undeserving object of his grace and action, we were no good, good for nothing, lazy, hateful, rebellious, disobedient, incorrigible sinners, cheats, liars, philanderers, adulterers, murderers... And the only hope for anyone like that is for divine intervention. For us to be crucified and buried with Christ. For our sins to be placed on our Savior. And, for each one of us to be washed clean. That's exactly what God does in baptism.

Now consider what that means for you today. You know what a nightmare it was to be dead in sin because that old, sinful nature of yours keeps trying to crawl out of the grave and haunt you with guilt and sin again and again. You know what it's like is to hear the devil suggest, "It doesn't matter if you keep on sinning! God will keep on forgiving you, right?" But thanks to Jesus and his work in you in baptism, you also know what it's like to be united with your Savior, dead to sin and set free from the power of the devil.

If you've forgotten what that's like, try this. Right after church, rush home, pack a picnic and put a few lawn chairs in the trunk. Then drive down the road until you find the carcass of some deer that didn't make it across the road last week. Park your car, set up your chairs, enjoy your lunch and wait for that deer to do something. Silly, you say? Of course! The deer's dead! In the same way, Paul says, because of God's grace given us in baptism, "We know that our old self was crucified with Christ, to make our sinful body powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin."

Just for kicks, try to teach that roadkill a few tricks. Try to help the deer to run again. Sneak up on it and try to scare it. It won't work, will it? The death you died in baptism means the same thing. Your old sinful nature was effectively drowned in baptism and buried in a watery grave. Now when the devil comes along and tries to tempt you, you can't hear him. When sin tries to entice you, you don't feel it. When guilt tries to plague your conscience, you don't even notice it. No matter how often sin prods and pokes at the corpse of its former domain, it has no power over us, "For the person who has died has been declared free from sin." That's why you should think of your baptism as your funeral. "You died to sin, how can you go on living in it any longer?"

And once you remember that you've been declared dead to sin and you've been buried with Christ in baptism, then also celebrate the fact that in baptism you were raised with Christ to live a new life. It's a wonderful trip, even if you've been to the garden tomb countless times. You come around the bend and you see the stone that was rolled away. Christ's grave is empty. Your Savior isn't there! "He has risen just as he said!"

"Since Christ has been raised from the dead," Paul writes, "he will never die again. Death no longer has control over him." That's for sure! Jesus met death and the grave head on, and there's no doubt about who won. It was a rout! Jesus swallowed up death in victory. And "because he lives we too shall live." Raised with Jesus in baptism, we enjoy real life forever. Thanks to Jesus and the new life he gives us in baptism, we can live lives of faith and forgiveness, lives of devotion and thanks and praise, lives of love toward God and good for neighbor, lives that glorify the God who made us --in baptism-- both "dead to sin AND alive to God in Christ Jesus." Amen.