

June 26, 2005
Pentecost 6

"Cherish Your Baptism"

ROMANS 6:1-11

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live 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 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. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For 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-- ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The carpet had just been cleaned by a professional cleaning service. The kids were playing in the wet back yard with the dog. He was covered with mud. One of the children left the patio door open. Mom saw the dog make a beeline for the open door. Her determination won the day. She met the dog at the door, and kept him from tracking mud over the newly cleaned carpet. Can you imagine this woman telling her friend? "I just had the carpet cleaned and felt sorry for the dog, so I let him inside and now the carpet is completely covered with dirty footprints."

My dear Christians, you have been cleaned, made pure and holy by the blood of Jesus. That's what the first chapters of Romans tell us so clearly. Chapter five ended with the words "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more." When you are clean, pure and holy in God's sight through Jesus, you do not want sin coming back into your life. Chapter five also tells us about the peace we have in Jesus when it says, "Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." When you are at peace with God you want to go to war against the sin of your past life and any new sin or weakness that may develop in you as life changes.

In our Bible camp this past week we learned that Jesus provides us with tools that we can use to strengthen our faith and help us build our lives on him. He gives us the Bible to bless us and build us up in our faith. He also gives us our baptism as a blessing to help us live a new Christian life. This morning we want to take a closer look at these words from Romans 6 to help you **Cherish Your Baptism** as you seek to live a new life for Christ our Savior.

1) Look at how your baptism connects you to Jesus' death

Our baptism is valuable to us because it connects us to Jesus' death and enables us to say,

"I died to sin." Do you ever find yourself thinking you can open yourself to sin because God will forgive you anyway? Listen to what Paul says, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?" We died to sin. When you are dead you do not worry about making payment car payments, going to the doctor, going to work, fixing the car, or mowing the lawn. We have become dead to sin it no longer is a burden that we have to worry about because we actually died with Christ when a full payment was made.

Please bear with me as I try to illustrate this in as practical a way as possible. If you see a dead possum on the road, that has been run over by a car several times, that possum no longer has to worry about crossing roads, finding food, or being chased by dogs. That is what has happened to you and me. We died to sin. It is no longer something that is going to condemn me on judgment day. The last thing I ever want in my life is to try open up new situations where sin starts entering into my life again. Who would ever think of picking up a dead possum, taking it home, putting it next to food and water? The Christian who is dead to sin does not want to sin and nurture it by saying, "Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?"

What's the connection between baptism and being dead to sin? "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 baptism into death?" The word "baptism" is used over 100 times in the New Testament. Most often it refers to what Jesus told his disciples to do with all people in Matthew 28. "Go therefore and baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Baptism involves washing people with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is no reason not to look at these words here in Romans 6 and believe that they are referring to baptism as Jesus set it up for his church before he ascended into heaven.

What happens in baptism? Some would say baptism is an ordinance, a requirement God makes of you after you become a Christian to show that you really mean what you believe about Christ. Or, I have heard people say they were baptized because it symbolized the new life they wanted to live in Christ. As we look at these words more closely we see no indication of God asking us to do something for him. But we see every indication that God is doing something special for us in baptism. Notice the past tense, "Baptized into Christ," and "Baptized into his death," and "Baptized into his burial." Galatians three says that in our baptism we put on Christ. That enables us to be called God's dear children. I can never put on Christ by myself. God in his mercy must do this for me. It is totally correct to say that faith puts Christ on us and faith connects us to his death and burial. It is also correct to say the Word of God works faith, gives us Christ, and connects us to his death and burial. And it is correct to say that baptism works faith, gives us Christ and connects us to his death and burial.

A father and his daughter were riding in the car on a warm summer day with the windows down, and suddenly the girl screamed, "A bee, daddy, there is a bee next to me." She freaked out and for a good reason. You see she was deathly allergic to bee stings. Her dad said, "Sweetie, it is OK. He put his hand on the bee and absorbed its sting. He opened his hand, it flew away, but the stinger was stuck in his hand. That's what Jesus' death and burial means for us. There was a time in history when he took the eternal punishment

in our place for our sin. By a miracle of our faith he connects us to this death and burial of Jesus. Through our baptism we are baptized into Jesus, baptized into this death, and baptized into his burial. That gives us tremendous power to say no to sin and get rid of it in our lives. The Christian going into the field of battle against sin and Satan can triumphantly proclaim as Martin Luther did, "I have been baptized! I have been baptized! I have been baptized."

2) Look at how your baptism connects you to Jesus' resurrection

Our baptism that unites us to Christ Jesus death also unites us in faith to his resurrection. "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." Just as Jesus is now lives a new life with his heavenly Father, we who are united with him like branches to a vine are also privileged to join in living a new life. In Colossians 3 we are told "Since you have been raised with Christ set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." We are already seated with Jesus in the heavenly realms. We already live and reign with him as glorious members of his kingdom.

This connection to Jesus through your faith and the baptism that brings Christ to you is so powerful that it frees you from the old self that always wants to pull you back down into the deep dark hole of sin. "For 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-because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." At the time these words were written one third of the Roman Empire was made up of slaves. Most of these slave never found freedom from a life of slavery until they died. After they were dead, the cruel masters could no longer beat them or take their rights away. They were free. The same thing happened to you in Christ. You died with Jesus. With Jesus' death the old person that was a slave to sin also died.

When we hear the Bible tells us how baptism brings Christ to us, or connects us to Christ, or puts on Christ or buries us with Christ, or gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit, or gives us the forgiveness of sin, or washes away sin, or gives us good conscience before God, we realized how blessed we are. I don't like to see the old person that I am without Christ. I don't like to see evil thoughts towards other people, or impure thoughts inside of me, or lack of kindness and love to people around me. That's the old person, the old Steve. I don't want that old person in my life anymore. This old person likes to inject the poison of sin into my life. It makes me unacceptable to God and puts me under the curse of eternal death and punishment. I know and you know that this old person died with Jesus. With that death comes a new life. Just as Jesus is living a new life with his heavenly Father, we are privileged to live this new life with him.

Some years ago I was counseling with a man and wife who were having some marital problems. Their teenage daughter was successfully driving a wedge between Mom and Dad, and they were constantly fighting over what to do with her. I asked the man, John (not his real name) would you be willing to die for Mary (not her real name), and he said with tears in his eyes, "I would." Then we turned to Mary and said, "Mary would you be willing to die for John?" She said, "Yes, with tears streaming down her faces." But then came the tough question, "John, would you be willing to live for Mary?" "Mary, would you be willing to live for John."

Look at what Jesus has done for you. Jesus not only pledged to his Father that he was willing to die for us, he pledged that he was willing to live for us and make us co-heirs in his kingdom. "The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God." He lives a life of glory to his heavenly Father, and you and I are part of that new life. We are branches connected to Jesus the vine. We see all sorts of good fruit coming forth in our lives.

Because you are connected to Christ, and have been baptized into Christ, you can count yourself dead to sin. "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ." The math is so simply. Count it up. 0 times any number is always 0. What Jesus did when he died multiplies a zero to anything I have done wrong in my life. That enables me to count myself dead to sin and alive in Christ.

Remember the day the dog tried to get onto the clean carpet with dirty paws. He was no match for Mom, standing at the door with a broom, blocking his path. Sin is no match for when you cherish your baptism that has connected you to Jesus' death and resurrection. Amen.