

Romans 6:1-14

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Sermon

We understand baptism as many things in the life of the church and the life of the one who has been baptized. Christian initiation, bringing a new child into the fold, adoption, ingrafting, sign and seal of God's everlasting grace. Each of these are legitimate ways we think about the moment and act of baptism. But the one that we struggle with most, I think, is the concept that in baptism we are united in a death like Christ's so that we can be united in a resurrection like Christ's. That in some way, baptism is about dying. How difficult a realization to have when we hold a new born child, this brand new life that has such a vast and wonderful future laid out ahead of them. How do I explain to the parents who come seeking to have this child baptized that the waters are a symbol of death? In the words of Janne Teller, "From the moment we are born, we begin to die." How depressing.

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Too often baptism has become a momentary marker, something that has been checked off the to do list. "Pick up groceries, call the cable company, baptism - oh, I've taken care of that one - check." Some of us remember our baptism, some of us have heard stories, some only know that it happened, and still some have yet to be baptized. But most of us have a hard time thinking about baptism beyond the one-time event.

Rabbi Alvin Fine once wrote:

Birth is a beginning and death a destination; But life is a journey. A going, a growing from stage to stage: From childhood to maturity and youth to old age. From innocence to awareness and ignorance to knowing; From foolishness to and then perhaps, to wisdom. From weakness to strength or strength to weakness and often back again. From health to sickness and back we pray, to health again. From offense to forgiveness, from loneliness to love, From joy to gratitude, from pain to compassion. From grief to understanding, from fear to faith; From defeat to defeat to defeat, until, looking backward or ahead: We see that victory lies not at some high place along the way, But in having made the journey, stage by stage, a sacred pilgrimage. Birth is a beginning and death a destination; But life is a journey, a sacred pilgrimage, Made stage by stage... To life everlasting.

If you replaced the words "life" with "baptism" I believe you begin to get more of an understanding of what Paul was writing to the Romans. Baptism is a journey that begins with God's grace which proceeds even our birth. Baptism is marked and celebrated in the waters that wash over us in the sacrament. It is lived out in life, and it is completed in death. Baptism is a sacred journey, lived out each new day.

For Martin Luther, the great reformer, Baptism was a constant reminder of who he was and that his work was to glorify God. When the challenges and fears surrounded him as he struggled with the work of the Roman Catholic church of his time and the separation

that came about because of it - Luther would remind himself, "I am baptized, I am baptized." He did not say this to justify his work, but to reassure himself that in the midst of the unknown and the difficult, that he was a Child of God, that in baptism God's grace was made real in his life.

And that is our credentials as well. When we wonder if we have the words, or the faith, or the knowledge to share our hearts - we can remember that we are baptized. When we wonder about our mistakes or the possibility that we might faith in the future, we can remember that we are baptized. And when we wonder if we have anything to offer God, the church, the world - we can remember that we have been baptized. "Birth is a beginning and death a destination; But baptism is a journey." Thanks be to God for our baptism and for the grace we live by each new day. Amen