

Dying and Rising with Christ

Romans 6:1b-11

^{1b} Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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.

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ 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.

In the past few weeks we have had the joy of learning from the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Rome. We heard about the power of the gospel to put us in right relationship with God. We learned for the past two weeks that our right relationship depends on faith in what God did through Jesus rather than our good works or attempts to follow the Jewish Law.

Romans 5 culminates in an overwhelming climax of grace. Paul tells the history of creation from beginning to end. He explains one man's trespass or act of disobedience led to condemnation for all. God gave the law, but the powers of sin and death turned this good gift to their own ends. Then, Paul writes, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (5:20). Now one man's act of righteousness, that is Jesus, leads to justification (right relationship with God) and life for all (5:18). In chapter 5 Paul tells the story of our relentless, resourceful God who is determined to speak the last word. That last word is "eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (5:21).

Then, after that last word comes a next word, a question whose very utterance reveals the ways in which the fullness of redemption is not yet realized: if an

increase in sin sparks an even greater abundance of grace, why not remain in sin? "What then are we to say?" Paul asks. "Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" (6:1) **Ted A. Smith**

Commentator Shawnthea Monroe tells when her son was in preschool, he accidentally spilled an entire carton of milk on the floor. He was devastated by his mistake. So as she mopped the floor, she reassured him that everything was going to be just fine. She said, "Look! Now the whole floor is nice and clean!" He turned to her and said brightly, "Hey! Maybe I should spill on the floor more often!" To such a statement Paul tells us like the mother told her son: "By no means!" Just because God in Christ Jesus has the power to make things right is not an invitation to do wrong. **Shawnthea Monroe**

The Gospel does not teach that "a God without wrath brought humans without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross." "What then are we to say?" Should we remain in sin for the sake of expanding the glorious, costly abundance of grace given through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul's answer is first sharp—"By no means!" (v. 2)—then expansive. He reminds Christians in Rome of their baptism. Baptism unites Christians to Christ so completely that we share in his death and resurrection. Our old self is crucified with Christ on the cross, and that death breaks the power of sin over our lives. We die with Christ, we are buried with Christ, and, Paul writes, we will surely rise with Christ to "walk in newness of life" (v. 4). **Ted A. Smith**

Paul's reminds us that baptism is more than simply a rite of passage. It is a radical change in identity, one that opens up new possibilities. There is a "before" and an "after." Before, we were slaves to sin, without even the hope that we could do what is right. After, we have the opportunity truly to live and be "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11).

Paul's message is the matter of identity. Through baptism, we are given a new identity in Christ Jesus. Our day-to-day lives will not change, though, unless we embrace this new identity. Paul believes right identity precedes right actions.

I am told when entering medical school, students are instructed to call each other "doctor" from day one. They are not really doctors, but people who are living, learning, and growing into this new identity as doctors. Using the title is a way to remind them of the goal toward which they are striving.

In the same way, we are called the "saints of God." While few of us consider ourselves saints in the popular sense of that word, just hearing ourselves called saints made us feel ennobled and reminded us of who we are. Like those medical students, we are living, learning, and growing into a new identity. Through baptism, we have been given a new identity; embracing that new identity has the power to shape our behavior and move us to action. **Shawnthea Monroe**

Paul understands baptism as a type of exodus. As Israel once labored under Pharaoh, so humanity labored in bondage to sin. As Pharaoh's power was broken once when Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea, so sin's power over us was broken when we passed through the waters of baptism. Israel came through the water into the wilderness—a place where Pharaoh no longer held power over them and where God traveled with them, but still not the promised land. Even so, we move through the waters of baptism into a place where sin no longer has dominion, where God is with us, and where the fullness of resurrection life is still to come.

Paul makes clear that baptism is not only an event between the individual and God, but also a union with Christ that connects the baptized one with all the faithful in every time and place. Baptism is not a family celebration; it is incorporation into the body of Christ, and thus into a set of commitments (see Matt. 10:34-38; Luke 14:26). Baptism is not a magic spell that protects a person

from peril in this world and the next. On the contrary, in binding us to Christ, baptism places us on the way of the cross. Baptism is not a celebration of the waters of life, at least not in any simple sense; it is a drowning, an act that renders us "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11).

Dead to sin and alive to God, the baptized one, you and me, *cannot* remain in sin without betraying who we have become. So baptism grounds Paul's answer to the question in verse 1. It is not that acts of sin have become impossible for baptized Christians—our own lives make that clear enough, as whining and complaining continue to be our practice, insensitive words still escape our lips, and selfish acts still manifest themselves from time to time. Even after the exodus, the children of Israel can long for the fleshpots of Egypt. Nevertheless, something has happened. A page has turned, not only in individual lives, but also in the history of the world; and, by the grace of God, there is no going back. **Ted A. Smith**

You and I have been baptized into Christ, we have died with Him and now live with Him. We now grow in the newness of life! Thanks be unto God!

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16).