

INI

Trinity 6 / 12 July 2015

Romans 6,1-11

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you all. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, which was read earlier:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through Baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

So far the text. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our strength and our Redeemer.

Introduction. Today's text speaks to two concepts that touch all of us. There is the old saying, that there are two things none of us can escape in life – death and taxes. Of course, today we are not speaking about taxes (although elsewhere in Scripture taxes are mentioned); however, we are speaking about death. The other concept, however, is life.

Death and life. These two realities touch all people, regardless of culture or where people live.

You may be thinking, Pastor, you've mixed up the order. It should be life and death. After all, death is death, the end, finis. Is it as the psalmist writes,

The dead do not praise the LORD,
Nor do any who go down in silence. (Psalm 115,17)

or,

For there is no mention of Thee in death;

In Sheol who will give Thee thanks? (Psalm 6,5)

In contrast, the Psalmist writes,

While I live I will praise the LORD. (Psalm 146,1)

Should the order then be, life and then death? After all, when we read or hear of death, we think of finality, of the end. Every day the TV brings death into our living rooms — whether a car accident, a disaster in a far-off corner of the world, the daily list of atrocities from the Middle East, or the other crises. And then we have those deaths which occur daily, but whose only public notice is on the obituary page. These are deaths which do not capture the public imagination, but are real to the families who are affected.

Paul, however, reverses the natural order, He speaks first of dying and then of living. He does not do this because he does not have a clear grasp of the world around him, but rather because Paul's eyes were always fixed on Jesus Christ, — Who He was and what He did, not only for Paul but for all humankind. It is in Christ that the focus is first on His death and then His resurrection, His rising from the dead. Thus we come to the theme of today's sermon, "**Death Is The Door To Life.**" We'll speak of this in three parts:

- 1) Jesus Died To Open The Door To Life;**
- 2) The Meaning Of Being Baptized Into Christ;** and,
- 3) Dying Daily In Order To Live**

1) Jesus Died To Open The Door To Life. During His lifetime, Jesus said,

I am the Door of the sheep ... I am the Door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and go in and out, and find pasture. (John 10 7+9)

In this passage, Jesus is speaking of Himself as the Good Shepherd. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus is the One Who gathers believers such as you and I — and calls us sheep. Sheep need a shepherd. The shepherd is the one who takes care of them. Thus, as our Good Shepherd Jesus promises to give us pasture, not only salvation in this life, but also eternal life itself.

But to get to this pasture, sheep have to go through the Door which is Jesus Himself. Jesus speaks about opening this Door. He says,

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. (John 10,17)

Jesus is saying that He will have to die. In our text, Paul gives us the reason why Jesus had to die:

For the death that He [that is, Jesus] died, He died to sin, once for all. (Romans 6,10)

Jesus did not lay down His life for Himself. He laid it down for the sheep, for us. Jesus Himself says this:

The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (John 10,11)

He lays down His life for the sheep because sheep sin. That sheep sin is what Isaiah spoke of when he spoke about Jesus, the coming Messiah:

All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him. (Isaiah 53,6) – and “Him” is the Suffering Servant, Jesus Himself.

Jesus, Who was without sin, took on our sin, our iniquity. He took on Himself the big sins and the small sins; indeed, there is not a sin which existed or will exist that He did not take on. When Jesus was nailed to the Cross, those sins were the nails. When Jesus died on that Cross, He took our sins into death. God

made Him Who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5,21)

In death Jesus became our substitute, Who traded His life for ours.

After dying on the Cross, on the third day the stone from the tomb, the door of

the tomb, was rolled away, opened, and Jesus came forth from the dead. He is risen.

In rising from the dead, He rose for us, to show us that by going through the door of death He opens for us the door to life.

Through His death He closed the door on death, and in His resurrection He opened the door to life. In our Baptism we see that we pass through spiritual death to come to spiritual life. Thus, we ask about,

2) The Meaning Of Being Baptized Into Christ. Paul assumes that his readers know about Baptism. They know that it was instituted by Jesus Himself, when He told His disciples:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28,19)

Baptism is not something which people do, but rather something God does for them. This is what Peter told his listeners on the first Pentecost. After hearing about Jesus' death and resurrection, the crowd asked, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter's answer: "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2,37+38).

When Peter and Paul speak about being baptized in the name of Jesus, they are not ignoring the Father of the Holy Spirit. To be baptized in the name of Jesus is shorthand for the name of the triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But in these and other passages, what Paul and Peter are speaking of is Jesus' work of redemption, that is, His dying and rising again from the dead.

By His suffering and death, Christ has indeed earned for us the blessings of forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal life. Baptism is a means by which the Holy Spirit makes these blessings our own. Elsewhere Paul writes:

... but you were washed – that's Baptism –, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6,11)

To the early Christians in Galatia, Paul writes:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3,26+27)

Baptism is a Means of Grace.

In Holy Baptism, we are baptized into Jesus' death, as well as His resurrection. Because Jesus "died to sin once for all" (v 10), He carried our sins into death only once in order to win for us a forgiveness which lasts forever.

There are those who says that the whole idea of Baptism is borrowed from the pagan mystery religions of Jesus' day. Quite a few years ago, there was a book, *The Pagan Christ*, by Thomas Harpur. It maintained that everything in the New Testament was borrowed from the mystery religions and it is doubtful whether Jesus ever lived. This book was a bestseller and its author is an Anglican priest whose spiritual life is a history of wandering from the one, true faith and going backwards and clinging to ancient heresies and paganism. While there are some similarities between the mystery religions and Christianity, the differences are even greater. Let me explain.

While the mystery religions were concerned with the unity of the participant with a nature-deity, Christian Baptism has to do with the relationship of the Christian to the historical event of God's saving deed in Christ.

While the mystery religions were inclusive, that is, someone could belong to many at the same time, Jesus is exclusive — Jesus says:

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by Me. (John 14,6)

In the mystery and nature religions, dying and rebirth take place annually in an ever continuing cycle; Paul says Jesus died once for all. Period. End of discussion. No everlasting cycle.

There are other differences but all of them show the clear and important differences as the ones I've mentioned. But what Harpur is trying to do is present

this as something brand new, when in fact it is a mish-mash of heresies with which the early Church had to do battle. Harpur tries to sow the seeds of doubt in believers' minds and reinforce the beliefs of the scoffers. But behind this book stands the spirit of the old evil foe who wishes for nothing else than that Christians doubt and fall away from the faith, or, unbelievers continue to harden their hearts and stop their ears.

But the Holy Spirit through the Gospel still breaks through the veil of spiritual darkness and sin to work saving faith into the hearts of people through the Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament, one of which is Holy Baptism.

As we ponder Jesus' death and resurrection, and become more aware of our participation in Jesus' once and for all saving activity for us and the world, we think anew on the following statement:

3) Dying Daily In Order To Live. Because Baptism really saves, because Jesus has opened the door to Life by having gone through death, we should die daily to sin so that we may live before God.

Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism is based on our text for today and clearly explains this concept:

What is the significance of baptizing with water? It signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written? St. Paul writes, Romans, chapter sixth: We are buried with Christ by Baptism into death, that, like He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life.

Even though Jesus died once for all, unfortunately we sin daily. We sin with our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. And each day as we think about our sins before God, we cannot but help throw ourselves at the mercy seat of the heavenly Father and plead for forgiveness on account of what Jesus has done for us.

Paul writes that the person who dies is "freed from sin." This sounds as if Paul is saying that it is possible not to sin. But we know that this is not the teaching

of Scripture. The Apostle John says: “If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1,8). Paul wrestles with sin and exclaims: “For the very good that I wish to do, I do not do” (Romans 7,19a).

Perhaps a better way of translating this phrase, “freed from sin” is “justified” or “declared free from sin.” Forgiveness gives us pardon from our sins.

In the criminal justice system, if we have been convicted of a crime, sometimes we can apply for a pardon. If enough time has passed since our conviction, and if we have stayed out of trouble, then we may get a pardon. This gives us a chance to live without a criminal record.

In some ways, this is the same as being pardoned by God. But while in the world our pardon depends on what we have done, with God it depends on what Jesus has done for us. If we ask for forgiveness for Jesus’ sake, God “is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1,9).

Without forgiveness, people live under the dominion of sin, death and the power of the devil. This is the natural state of all humanity. However God sent His Son into the world so that all who believe and trust in Him for forgiveness have what forgiveness promises, life and salvation. This is God’s gift to us; we cannot earn it or deserve it — everything depends on Jesus. It is forgiveness which gives us a new Lord to live for, the Lord Jesus.

After having been forgiven, however, God expects us to respond to Him in our living with Him. He has given us Holy Baptism as a Means of Grace so that when we stumble we might have the assurance that we can depend on what He has done for us in Jesus. He gives us this Means of Grace so that we might daily remember to confess our sins and receive the forgiveness which Jesus has earned for us. Daily we are to crucify our old self, not with hair shirts or beatings, but with repentance and contrition.

In our lives God gives us a choice: whom will we serve? Sin or Jesus? Death or Life? Satan or the Lord? This is a choice, however, that is open only to believers, those who have been forgiven. To those who do not believe in Jesus, there is no choice, and that is a pretty dreadful prospect when you think about it.

We are to daily fight against the sin which so easily besets us (Hebrews 12,1). Let's face it, though, sometimes we fight more strenuously than other times. But if we find our fight against sin flagging, then let us look to our Baptism, and again drown the old Adam with all its sins and evil lusts which have been buried with Christ, and then see that in His resurrection Jesus would have us call forth the new and forgiven man who is to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Conclusion. Jesus went into death to earn for us what we do not deserve and could never on our own earn — forgiveness of sins.

In His death He closed the door on death and broke its power.

In Jesus' resurrection He has opened the door of life for us.

He has given us baptism so that daily we might live in the power of His death and resurrection. First death, then life. First forgiveness, then we can come forth and live before God under the lordship of Jesus.

Now we can walk in newness of life with Jesus, living with Him now and forever. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

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