

Sermon #1,212: Rom. 6:1-7 (Hymns 227, 241, 422, 243; 316/317, 242, 209:4)
6-26-16, Augsburg Confession Sunday/Trinity 5, Bethany-Princeton MN

BAPTISM: WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE = TAKING UP THE CROSS

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, who baptizes us into life under the cross:

We've been learning about Baptism the past few weeks. We know that Baptism saves. In Baptism God gives the blessings of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. So we know very well that Baptism delivers a person from the curse of sin. It's why we want babies baptized ASAP.

But we don't know as well that baptism delivers us from the power and rule of sin. In this epistle reading from Romans 6, St. Paul tells us this.

The Sermon Text, Romans 6:1-7: ¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ 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. ⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. We pray: Cleanse and defend Your Church by the sacrifice of Christ. United with Him in Holy Baptism, give us grace to receive with thanksgiving the fruits of His redeeming work and daily follow in His way; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen! (*Proper 15, Series C; Pastoral Care Companion, p. 586*)

To the question, "What does Baptism mean for my daily life?" Martin Luther chose Romans 6:4 to be the answer: **"We were buried with Christ Jesus through baptism into death, that just as He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."** That we "walk in newness of life" – this has to do with how you live, it's about living your faith. Many people want to know how to do this and don't even know that it's Baptism that God has given to help in this!

Remember how we began in baptism, with Jesus' words: "***Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ...***" In Baptism God makes a disciple – someone who *follows* Him, not only in believing but also in doing.

Romans 6 begins with a question: "**What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?**" St. Paul is answering a basic objection that he knows people will have to the Christian gospel. This is not just an imagined argument, though. It is real. People still have these questions. It is not purely theoretical, either. It is a legitimate complaint from what people can see in Christians, or more specifically, in Lutherans.

This complaint is one that you heard being answered in Article 20 of the Augsburg Confession. It begins: "*Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding good works.*" The accusation was that if you believe and teach that you are saved by faith alone, not by faith plus good works, then you are discouraging people from doing good works.

We are well trained as Lutherans in the teaching that you are justified or saved by grace alone, through faith alone. The "alone" part is important. It means that our good works cannot save us, even partially. It is through faith alone, trusting in Jesus. It's for Jesus' sake. What Jesus did saves you. If you get partial credit, if your good works get in there at all, then Jesus is not getting all the glory. This message is the center of the Christian faith.

The problem comes when our sinful nature gets hold of this and abuses it, saying, "*What a good deal – God likes to forgive and I like to sin, so I can sin as much as I want.*" This is the question St. Paul anticipates: "**Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?**" Another way we verbalize this is to say, *Nobody's perfect. Everybody sins. God forgives everything*, as a way of diminishing or excusing our sins. Do people see in us a lack of concern over our sins, that we don't try real hard not to sin? Do they see worse lives despite faith in Jesus? Because that would be terrible. Because God forgives sins, can you slough off skipping church, holding a grudge, wasting time at work, talking back to a parent, or putting someone down?

God's apostle answers: "**Certainly not!**" That is the Bible's answer. The Bible teaches that you are saved by faith alone, not faith plus works. But it also says that God commands you to do good works. Good works are not necessary for salvation, but they are necessary. "Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone." If you have faith, good works will be done by you. Good works show and "make known the faith that lives" inside you (#227 v. 10).

But this godly living does not just happen. For the things you do actually to be considered “good works” by God, you must do them willingly. You can’t be forced to do these things, and the Law only works by force. The Law does serve a purpose in this area: it tells you what the good works are that God wants you to do for your neighbors. You know what a good work is by knowing the 10 Commandments. So the Law tells you what to do. It does function as a guide for how God wants you to live out your faith.

But the problem is, the Law does not give you any ability to do it. The Law can’t help you do it. Only the Gospel can bring you to do it. That you live a Christian life, do the works of love, say no to sin, hate your sin, make the effort to live at peace with each other, exercise patience with others, etc., is not because you’re so good at doing the Law but because of the Gospel – what Christ has done for you. True good works are done not from being forced to do them, but out of love for Christ, really they are done *from* Christ. His love is the source of your love and your living for Him.

This is where Baptism comes in. Baptism is the Gospel. In these verses from Romans 6, it says that every Christian is to **“die to sin,”** to **“not live in any longer in sin,”** to **“walk in newness of life,”** to **“no longer be slaves to sin.”** But all of this is connected to Baptism!

It is **“through baptism”** that you **“were buried with Christ into death,”** and just as Christ is risen and lives freed from the burden of sin, that is how **“we also walk in newness of life.”**

It’s in baptism that your **“old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with.”** Your body of sin was done away with. The old Adam in you was drowned, with all sins and evil lusts.

It’s in baptism that we were first **“freed from sin,”** and made to be **“no longer slaves of sin.”**

This was not a onetime thing only, but your baptism furnishes the power to continue on this path. Whenever you repent, you drown your sins. Whenever you receive God’s forgiveness, He frees from sin – not only the curse and condemnation of your sins, but He also frees you from the power and rule of sin. You make use of this whenever you are overpowered by sin. Baptism gives you a continuous connection to this strength that you need.

And you do need this, because anyone who wants to do God’s will is going to be opposed in powerful ways by the devil, the world, and the sinful

flesh. You will not be applauded by many people for resisting sin. It will not feel good. It is saying no to yourself, which is not easy or fun. Your flesh resists it. The world says, Lighten up. The devil says, Stop fighting it so much.

But this is the path of self-denial. It is the way of the cross. That's what happens when you are baptized. Christ puts you on the way of the cross. It is not easy, and often during life you lay down your cross. But He has baptized you into a life in which you always have access to the fountain of grace that drowns your sins and makes you pure and clean, and gives you strength to pick up the cross and follow Jesus. Through your baptism you are (as Psalm 1 says) like a tree planted by the rivers of water – Baptism! – that brings forth its fruit in its season, every minute of your life.

This is the baptismal life. Your life as His child is shaped by Jesus' cross. As a baptized child of God you live in the shadow of the cross. You're always needing help, needing forgiveness, needing strength to live a godly life, and Christ is always giving it to you. By your baptism He has made you clean and keeps you clean. Your victory over sin is the victory He won, and gives to you through the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you. Amen!