

“The Transforming Power of Baptism”¹

Text: Romans 6:1-11²

Baptism of our Lord / January 8, 2011

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This is the season. How many resolutions did you make? It's the season for self-improvement programs. There is a reason why the “Y” gives away free memberships in January. The reality is, by February or March, many of the free memberships will also be the unused memberships.

Change does not come easily to anyone. St. Paul recognizes this in today's Epistle. In fact, he recognizes that were it not for God acting on our behalf, the change needed to enter the kingdom of God could never occur. Only through the action of God can the change occur which results in eternal life.

Left to ourselves ... listen to Paul's question: ***What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?***

That is the language of change. We have died to sin, and ***we are now alive unto God in Christ Jesus.***³

¹ PR: CP 87:152

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³ V. 11

We Are Buried w/ Christ Through Baptism

It is Good Friday every day. We are buried, placed into the tomb, declared dead, with our Lord Jesus Christ, through our baptism.

To live a worldly life, opposing God at every turn, is incompatible with the life of faith.

Jesus said: ***Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.***⁴

Clearly, there is a difference between the true believer and the unbeliever. We cannot live two separate lives.

I am reminded of the story of a business-man who brought his boss home for dinner. The boss was a blustery, arrogant, demanding and dominating man. After introducing the boss to his wife and children, they went into the living room to visit. The little boy just sat and stared at the man. Finally the boss said, "Little boy, why are you staring at me?" The child said, "Daddy says, you are a self-made man." The boss beamed proudly, and answered: "Yes, young man, I think you are quite right, I am a self-made man!" The little boy asked: "If you are self made, why did you make yourself like that?"

The best anyone can do is insufficient. The best we can do is reflect sinfulness. Only as God works in us through

⁴ Luke 11:23

Christ Jesus can that façade crumble and the new man emerge. We have been buried with Christ through baptism, drenched in the death of Jesus, that like Jesus, we might bask in the new life of Easter.

We were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. The difference between living a worldly life, and living a Christian life, really comes down to a question of power. Is the power that drives my life my ability, my talent, my power? Or do I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me? Is my power Christ ... or is it me?

St. Paul addresses this in Galatians 5. ***Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.⁵***

Are we living the old life of sin, or the new life in Christ? And, if we are in Christ, how can we be sure of this relationship?

⁵ Galatians 5:19-21

We are United by Baptism w/ Christ

The answer is Baptism. We are united BY Holy Baptism WITH Christ Jesus. Listen again to verse 4: ***We were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*** Now, let's add verse 5: ***For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.***

We don't walk through this life alone. We are not left to "do the best we can." The promise of our Savior is clear: ***"I am with you always!"***⁶ He breaks the bond of sin. He shatters the power of the evil one. Baptism unites us with everything that Jesus has done.

One day St. Paul was recounting to a crowd of people how he came to faith. He talked about his Damascus road experience, and hearing the voice of Jesus speak to him. He talked about spending three days blind, waiting for the answer the Lord had promised. And then he told the crowd the answer. A man named Ananias said to Paul: ***Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*** In that singular, simple act, (which took place for Paul in a house, most likely with water from a bowl or basin) Paul was united permanently with Christ. His life was permanently changed. And so was yours, the day you were baptized.

⁶ Matthew 28:20

Verse six speaks of what happened that day: ***We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.***

In the winter of 1863, a young mother was making her way across southern Wales, carrying in her arms her infant son. She was overcome by a blinding blizzard and never reached her destination. A few days later her body was found. When her body was rolled over, it was discovered, before she died, she had taken off her outer coat. She carefully wrapped her baby in it, and then laid down in such a way as to cover and protect her baby. Much to everyone's surprise, the baby was still alive. She gave her life for her child. That child, David Lloyd George, would grow up to become Prime Minister of Great Britain. He, along with President Woodrow Wilson, would be the chief architects of the Treaty of Versailles, the treaty that brought to an end World War I.

We are united through the water of Baptism with a Savior who did much the same for us. He gave His life that we might live! He died, verse 6 says: ***so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.***

We Live w/ Christ Thru Baptism

We live WITH Christ THROUGH Baptism. Can there be any greater news than this? Jesus says to you: ***“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.²In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”⁷***

Paul in our text adds: ***So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*** Christ and His victory are ours!

Engrafted into Christ, secured in His love, protected by His promise, we can face all things, for our lives have been changed! Death has given way to life.

We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Baptism has given us this knowledge. The transforming power of Baptism is and always will be at work in us.

May God grant that we, daily, find ourselves reminded of this. And may we, led by the Spirit, resolve to share this great Good News. May many see and come to know, Christ, alive, in and through us. Amen.

⁷ John 14:1-4a