

Sermon for March 6, 2024 – Midweek Lent 4

Romans 6:1-4, 12-14 (EHV)

Theme: Because of God's work in Baptism

- 1) You've died to sin.
- 2) You've been raised to live a new life.

¹ What shall we say then? Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase? ² Absolutely not! We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life... ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires. ¹³ Do not offer the members of your body to sin as tools of unrighteousness. Instead, offer yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead, and offer the members of your body to God as tools of righteousness. ¹⁴ Indeed, sin will not continue to control you, because you are not under law but under grace.

I once conversed with a man from Green Bay who did not believe in infant baptism. Why was he against it? Because most of the people he knew who were baptized as infants were not what he would call “dedicated Christians who truly give themselves over to Christ.” His argument went along these lines: “If infant baptism truly saved, why do so many either fall from the faith later in life or not act in a Christian way?”

His argument was built on faulty logic because I also know many fine Christians who were baptized as infants, as well as many who dedicated themselves to Christ as adults, only later to fall from grace. Nevertheless, his observation got me thinking. Why do many baptized people live no differently than those who aren't? Did their baptism have no effect? No, instead, these people don't understand the meaning their baptisms have for their daily lives.

Do you understand the meaning baptism has for your daily life? I pray you do, because the encouragement and hope God offers through that blessed sacrament is a great source of comfort and guidance in life. Therefore, with St. Paul as our guide, let us learn how we relive our Baptisms daily under the theme: **Because of God's work in Baptism**, 1) You've died to sin; 2) You've been raised to live a new life.

Part One: Because of God's work in baptism, you've died to sin.

Just one verse before our sermon text, Paul makes a fantastic statement about God's grace. Even though sin increased after God gave his law, God's grace in forgiving sin increased even more - thereby gloriously revealing just how amazing the Lord's merciful love actually is!

Let me explain what I mean: no one would think much if you forgave a \$10 debt. Forgiving a \$1000 debt will impress your friends but probably not make the local news. Forgive billions of dollars of debt, and people will speak of your kindness and generosity worldwide. God's grace works on the same principle: the more sins he forgives for Christ's sake, the brighter his mercy shines – encouraging more people to repent and follow him in faith.

Because God has shown us such great mercy in Christ, the apostle Paul asks: *What shall we say then?* (That is to say, what will our attitude be in response to God's extraordinary grace?) *Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase?*

Purposely sin so God's grace may increase? That would be like me saying to my parents, who paid off my seminary debt: "Let me get into more debt, Mom and Dad, so you can appear even more generous by bailing me out of that, too." Would that be the proper way to thank them for showing me such grace? *Absolutely not!*

And yet, here is the sad truth: we often act as if God's grace gave us a license to sin. Too often, people have told me: "Pastor, I know what I am doing is wrong, but it doesn't matter because God will forgive me anyway." Still worse, I must confess that there have been times in my life that I have acted in such a manner! Haven't you? But that doesn't make it right. Did Jesus die on the cross so that we can do whatever sinful thing we want – trusting that God will forgive us in the end?

"Absolutely not!" the Apostle Paul answers, *"We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer?"*³ *Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*

When Jesus went to the cross, he carried your sins to such a degree that when God the Father looked at His Son, he saw you. When Christ died, you died. More than that, when Christ rose, you rose with him – freed from the everlasting consequences your sins had earned.

We died to sin. Or, to say it another way, sin is dead to us. How so? Because the Holy Spirit has united us to Jesus at our baptism so closely that we can say: "Whatever is true of Jesus has also become true of me." When Jesus died on the cross, it's as if you died; when Jesus rose free from sin, it's as if you rose free from sin.

God has given you a new identity through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. *In fact*, as the apostle Paul wrote elsewhere, *you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Indeed, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*ⁱ

Think of what that means: God has made you his child by awakening faith in your heart through Holy Baptism. You are a prince or princess of heaven and heir of all that is God's; why would you want to do the things that displease God and separated you from him in the first place? You see,

God not only saved you from the consequences of your sin, but he also raised you with Christ to live a new life, as the following verse of our text indicates:

Part Two: Because of God's work in baptism, we've been raised to live a new life.

⁴ We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.

Carrying our sins, Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died as sin personified – thereby fulfilling God's justice.ⁱⁱ Because Jesus paid for our sins through his death, God the Father declared Jesus innocent of all sins because all sin had been punished in him. God, therefore, raised Jesus from the dead to live a new life — holy, sinless, free, and never to die again. And what God did for Jesus, He did for all of us because baptism connects us to Christ. We entered the waters of baptism as sinners and came out saints – dead to sin and raised to live a new life in Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ Through that blessed sacrament, the Holy Spirit has awakened a new man in our hearts who confesses with Saint Paul: *I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*^{iv}

Yes, God gave us the wonderful sacrament of Baptism for a purpose: not as an excuse to continue living in sin, but as an escape from it. ¹²*Therefore,* the apostle Paul writes, *“do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires. ¹³Do not offer the members of your body to sin as tools of unrighteousness. Instead, offer yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead, and offer the members of your body to God as tools of righteousness.*

We have every reason to fight against our sinful flesh as it craves sin: we belong to God! Our identity is not tied to our past sins but to Christ and his death and resurrection. Remembering our Baptisms, we remember Christ and drown the old Adam in us through repentance – trusting the LORD to forgive and help us in our daily battle against the devil as he raises a new man inside us who desires to please God.

I can't state it enough: remembering who you are in Christ, who God declared you to be at your Baptism, is essential in your fight against the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. How so? Because, whenever the waves of evil desire come crashing against you – making it seem you cannot do anything but sin, you can seek refuge in the LORD through prayer and rely on his strength. You can fall at his feet and ask the Holy Spirit to take over the fight – not by surrendering yourself to sin, but by remembering him who died for you and rose again. You are God's child – washed clean in the blood of his Son. You are God's child – declared to be such before all the angels in heaven at your baptism. God will send that same army of angels to help you. The devil, the world, and your sinful flesh are lying to you as they try to overwhelm you with the feeling that you must sin to find relief. You don't have to give in to them because you don't belong to them anymore. They no longer have any actual power over you. Your sinful self has been buried with

Christ through baptism so that, just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so he raised you – clean and free from sin to live your new life in him.

“But,” someone might confess, “even though I don’t want to sin, I still sin. Why is that the case if, in baptism, I have been raised with Christ to live a new life?” It’s because you still live on this evil earth, and your sinful nature will remain with you until the day you die. In the next chapter after our sermon text, the apostle Paul speaks about his struggle with sin: how he finds himself doing the evil he does not want to do instead of the good he wants to do. He laments: *What a miserable wretch I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*^v And why does Paul thank God? He explains: *So then, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*^{vi}

You see, by keeping the law perfectly in our place and dying in payment for our sins, Jesus freed us from the law that condemned us. Baptism connects us to Christ through the faith the Holy Spirit created in our hearts. We no longer live under the threat of God’s law, but under the mercy of his forgiving grace – as the last verse of our sermon text indicates: *¹⁴Indeed, sin will not continue to control you, because you are not under law but under grace.*

In other words, the grace of God that washed away all my sins is my power to live a new life for God, not the law with its threats. And when I fall? I can go to Jesus in repentance for the immediate forgiveness of my sins, as the apostle John once wrote: *My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.*^{vii}

Yes, you live under grace, not under the threats of the law. Christ’s forgiving love is your power to overcome temptation. It is your reason to repent when you sin, your comfort in knowing you are at peace with God, and your strength to press on in your fight against temptation — knowing that heaven is your home. Why? Because you belong to God. He put his name on you at your baptism.

The man from Green Bay who talked to me about baptism had it wrong. He relied on his strength to please God – thinking that baptism was nothing more than his dedicating himself to God. The truth is that, through baptism, God dedicates himself to us - awakening and strengthening faith in our hearts through the Gospel, connecting us to Christ, and giving us every support necessary for our daily battle with the devil, the foremost of which is the Holy Spirit himself.^{viii}

Brothers and sisters in Christ: understand the beautiful blessings God has given you in the sacrament of Baptism and use them daily in your struggle against sin. Through baptism, you’ve died to sin with Christ. Through baptism, you’ve been raised with Christ to live a new life. Amen.

ⁱ Galatians 3:26-27 EHV

ⁱⁱ Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 6:6-11

^{iv} Galatians 2:20 EHV

^v Romans 7:24-25 EHV

^{vi} Romans 8:1-2 EHV

^{vii} 1 John 2:1-2 EHV

^{viii} Cf. Acts 2:38