

**Seventh Sunday in Pentecost
July 3, 2005
Romans 6:3-11**

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Holy Baptism Is God's Power for the Struggle against Sin

1. Power from being united to Jesus
2. Power to end our slavery to sin
3. Power for new life with Christ

^{NIV} Romans 6:3 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 through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Fellow Saints of God,

Romans 6 begins with three questions in the course of two verses. **"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"** These questions were prompted in part by the recognition that God's grace is magnificent in its size and scope. Paul had just written, **"Where sin increased, grace increased all the more."** (5:20) No matter how many sins the law brings to light, there's still more than enough grace in Jesus Christ to cover those sins. And there's no sin too great to be forgiven. That's how amazing God's grace is.

But this assertion of the wondrous extent of God's grace is sometimes met with a kind of devilish logic that says, If God's grace is as great as

all that, then maybe I ought to sin like mad, to behave like some wasteful heir of an immense fortune who is convinced that the money won't ever run out. After all, there's more than enough grace to cover all that sinning, isn't there?

Romans 6 is the answer to that kind of ungodly logic. We died to sin when we came to faith in Jesus. We don't want to live in it any longer. God has made me his own. He Spirit lives in me. Now I love him and I hate sin. What pleases God, that pleases me. But...I've still got a sinful nature. The sinful nature opposes the Spirit, making it difficult for us to serve God and trying to frustrate our good intentions at every turn. And, of course, Satan's goal is not simply to fight a running battle with Christians, but to win the war and destroy our souls by making us the slaves of sin once again. That makes it urgent for us to know how to get the upper hand on sin. The answer is right here in the 6th chapter of Romans. **Holy Baptism is God's Power for the Struggle against Sin.** It's 1) power from being united to Jesus, 2) power to end our slavery to sin, and 3) power for new life with Christ.

1. Power from being united to Jesus

There is a popular view of baptism which says that baptism is essentially something that I do to show my faith in God and demonstrate my commitment to Jesus. But listen to what Paul says here: *"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* As Paul describes baptism here, it isn't so much about what I do as it is about what Christ has done. God is at work in baptism. His Spirit works in those who are baptized. In baptism we are united to Jesus in his death and resurrection. It was Jesus who died at Calvary to pay the penalty for our sins, but through baptism it is as if we died. The debt has been paid. Baptism personalizes the forgiveness. Through Holy Baptism we are also united with Christ's resurrection. It was Jesus whom God the Father raised from death, but through baptism which unites us to Jesus, we have been raised to life, too. In baptism, Jesus gives us his death for sin and his resurrection to life.

"How can this be?" some people want to know. "Do you mean to say that a few handfuls of plain old Modesto tap water and a recitation of a few words of the baptismal formula have the power to accomplish all of that?" And our answer must be: By the promise of God and the power of his Word: Yes. Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God's command and connected with God's Word. It's

not the water that does these things, but the word of God that is in and with the water and faith that trusts the word of God in the water.

Now if this is true, if baptism has such wonderful power because it unites us to Jesus and to his death and resurrection, then maybe I ought to pay a little more attention to my baptism. I'm guessing that a lot of us are a little foggy about when and where we were baptized. It happened a long time ago, perhaps, and a long ways away. And we're not always quick to see the ongoing significance of our baptisms. But Paul reminds us here that the day of our baptism was a red-letter day in our lives. We were joined to Jesus then and thus in baptism we have a consistent source of power for our daily struggle against sin.

But what do we mean by that? In what way is baptism a source of power in our daily struggle to resist sin and serve God? Is baptism this source of power simply by virtue of the fact that we were baptized? Let's hear what the apostle says.

2. Power to end our slavery to sin

"If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." The institution of slavery officially ended in this country with the Emancipation Proclamation. But there was another kind of slavery that persisted even after the Civil War. It's the slavery in which we are all born, the slavery to sin. Jesus said, **"Everyone who sins is a slave to sin."** (John 8:34) What set us free was not the stroke of a president's pen but the stroke of God's justice when he punished his own Son for our sins. In Holy Baptism, that freedom from the inherited guilt and the absolute power of sin became ours. We're slaves no longer.

But there's still a battle to be fought. The struggle against sin lasts as long as we live, because our old self endures that long. It's very trying. Having a sinful nature is like having a constant companion of questionable character. The sinful nature is hostile to God and tirelessly persistent in appealing to our baser instincts: lust, laziness, pride, anger, and greed. Even the apostle Paul was exasperated by the way the desires of the flesh dogged his footsteps. He said, **"When I want to do good, evil is right there with me."** (7:21) His experience is universal. Every day the sinful nature is there to oppose the new self and the desires of the Spirit.

What should we do? You can't talk nice to the old self and expect that it's going to reform or recede into the background. You can't try to convert the sinful nature to a different way of thinking. You have to crucify it anew every day. The Bible uses some vivid and violent terminology. You have to put the sinful nature to death. Listen to Luther in the *Small Catechism*. He asks, "**What does baptizing with water mean?**" Then he answers, "**Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death.**" What Luther refers to here is really the daily work of every believer: confessing sins and trusting in the forgiveness that Jesus obtained for us. When we do this, we're really returning to our baptisms, where we confessed our sinfulness and then had our sins all washed away. A confession of sins and reassurance of the gospel message of forgiveness for Jesus' sake are a vital part of our daily devotional life. This confessing of sin and being assured of forgiveness is also a prominent feature of our worship for the same reason. As the pastor announces the forgiveness of sins, he makes the sign of the cross, just as we received the sign of the cross at our baptism. And it's good to be reminded that we still have the option of individual confession of sins to the pastor, especially if there's some sin that we're keenly aware of and feel in our heart. It's through this daily crucifying of the old self that grow in our ability to gain the upper hand in our struggle against sin.

There is a way in which death frees people. If you owe money and die, you won't have to pay the debt. And if you're a prisoner and die, you get out of prison. It's like that with baptism. Baptism freed us from the slavery of sin and opened up to us the whole range of possibilities for serving God. In baptism God gives us the power to live a new life.

3. Power to live a new life

Paul writes here, "*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.*" Part of what the apostle is talking about here is the resurrection of our bodies that will take place when our Lord Jesus returns on the Last Day. This is the glorious hope of Christians. But it's clear from the way Paul writes that he is also referring to a resurrection that takes place as we trust the promise of forgiveness attached to baptism. This is the resurrection to a new life while we're still here on earth.

You see this new life in evidence in some of the great conversion stories in the Bible. Do you remember the new life so much in evidence when Jesus called the tax collector Zacchaeus down from the tree and invited himself to his house? Zacchaeus said, **"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."** (Luke 19:8) After King David repented of his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, he recounted his confession of sin and the joy of forgiveness in Psalm 51. In that psalm he implores the LORD, **"Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me."** And he continues with a pledge that's indicative of his new life: **"Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you."** (51:13-14) In his new life he's going to herald the goodness of God and share the news of God's mercy with all who will listen. It was the same with Saul, later known as Paul. This violent man, determined persecutor of Christians, saw Jesus, saw the error of his violent ways, and began to live the new life of an ambassador of Christ.

That, Paul says, is how we are to look at ourselves now that we belong to Christ through baptism. *"Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."* In our old way of living, we were dead to God and alive to sin. But now, having been united to Jesus in baptism, we are alive to God. Oh, we'll still struggle with sin until the day God calls us from out of life in this fallen world, but he hasn't left us to struggle alone. Now we know where to turn for God's help and power in our struggle. It's as close as our baptism. There we died to sin and rose to a new life. Amen.