

Pentecost 3-June 21, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Romans 6:1-11 and Matthew 10:24-39

“Dead to Sin”

-Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad



Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

You must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The scriptures for this Sunday from Romans and the gospel that I just read from Matthew can be challenging. What troubles most people is the reality that these words make becoming a follower of Jesus too easy. And if you really believe what Paul preached to his hearers, you might have to confess that you are a “Lutheran”. And such a confession won’t lead to peace but will lead to division.

Last week’s lesson from Paul proclaiming that you are justified by faith is at the foundation of what Lutherans believe. And most other followers of Jesus will confess that they believe they too are justified by faith, but they qualify that faith is just a starting point for justification. It is not the end. You are not made right by God simply by his word, but you also need to demonstrate you made are right with God by your actions. If you are justified by faith alone apart from the law, the same question will today be raised that was asked of Paul. “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?”

Paul responds to this question with an emphatic. “By no means!” Becoming a Confessional Christian does not mean you will keep on sinning just to see if Jesus will keep on forgiving you. As quickly as Paul says you won’t keep on sinning, he teaches what happens to you in baptism. He says, in baptism you are put to death and if you are dead, how can you live in sin? Or as Luther further clarifies, you are drowned daily in the waters of baptism. You are dead to sin and alive in Christ.

These are the words spoken at most funerals. These are words that grab people’s attention and cause division between people who hear them as good news from people that don’t believe because such a promise from God can’t be that certain. Let these words ring in your ears again, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death: Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

Again, isn’t this too easy. Baptism not only puts sin to death, but also gives eternal life. In baptism, Jesus doesn’t just crack the door open so you can get a glimpse of heaven. In baptism, Jesus doesn’t make your resurrection to eternal life a possibility. Nor is baptism a religious event when done at the right time that will propel your faith to a new level of faithfulness. The promise given in your baptism

carries you from death to your new life. The promise Jesus gives in baptism is complete without any help from you.

But your new life is not just what you experience when your life on earth is done. Your new life begins as soon as the promise is given with the water. It is wonderfully coincidental that Rikken Hartman, Judie Oien's great-grandson's birthday is today. I didn't have Rikken's birthday in mind when I chose this picture for the bulletin cover. I had Rikken's re-birthday in mind. This picture was taken the day when great-grandmother Judie was among the many witnesses of this unfailing promise bestowed on Rikken. This promise is given without any trial period to see how you feel about being a child of God. This promise does not depend on your future behavior. But rather this promise that puts sin to death. On Monday the Oien family will hear how this promise that was given to Rikken is the same that will be proclaimed as good news for Judie in her funeral service.

Now that sin has been put to death, we no longer live to sin, but live to God. When you live to God, sin has no dominion over you. Sin does not control your destiny, but God has determined your eternal destiny.

*Luther didn't arrive at this freedom from sin through baptism understanding without having it preached to him. Luther experienced a constant battle against the devil until he believed what Jesus said through these words from Romans. Luther recorded the following encounter he had one evening with Satan. **"When I awoke last night, the Devil came and wanted to debate with me; he rebuked and reproached me, arguing that I was a sinner. To this I replied: Tell me something new, Devil! I already know that perfectly well; I have committed many a solid and real sin. Indeed there must be good honest sins -- not fabricated and invented ones -- for God to forgive for His beloved Son's sake, who took all my sins upon Him so that now the sins I have committed are no longer mine but belong to Christ. This wonderful gift of God I am not prepared to deny but want to acknowledge and confess."***

Luther rebuked Satan's by admitting that he indeed was a sinner. Satan had hoped to lay more guilt on Luther with this accusation, but instead Luther sent Satan away by preaching to him that Jesus had already taken away his sins and they were now Christ's. Luther felt the freedom of being dead to sin and what it meant to be alive in Christ.

But right away Satan will appear again and raise the question, "What will you do with this freedom? Will you continue in sin?" And we respond to Satan as Paul and Luther did, "By no means!" Faith and love for our neighbor now have been put in the right order. With our sin set aside, we will do nothing less but to go out and serve our neighbor. We do not do these good works for our neighbor for our righteousness since we are first justified by faith in the waters of baptism. Good works and the love for our neighbor will spontaneously follow.

These are words that divide. But these words are good news for you because Jesus the word made flesh has separated you from your sins in your baptism and now you are alive in Christ. Amen.

