

In the Gospel we heard about the first Christian Baptism, the Baptism of Jesus. John the Baptist said to Jesus, **"I need to be baptized by you, ...but Jesus answered, "...it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:14-15).** Jesus came to the waters in contrition and He repented, but not for Himself. He received a bathing, a cleansing from sin, but not for Himself. And He received the Holy Spirit, but not for Himself. Jesus did all these things for you and me. We're going to talk about what this means in our walk with God and with one another this morning.

PRAYER

Years after Jesus' baptism St. Paul wrote about our Baptism, about how it transforms us. He wrote, **Romans 6:1-11, 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? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴We were buried therefore 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. ⁵For if we have been united with Him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. ⁶We 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. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. ⁹We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

Paul began with the rhetorical question: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom 6:1) It's "rhetorical" because we know the answer, and, in fact, there is only one answer. Paul himself exclaims, "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it!?" (Rom 6:2)

But why not sin-away and let God's grace abound?! For indeed, grace does abound, as Christ's death was for all people, for you, for me, for all time.

But it's tiring, isn't it? It's tiring to keep coming back to the same altar, with the same confession, with the same plea over and over again. We sound like a broken record. Indeed, we don't like that song and we want it to change. We want to get over it already,

to grow, to become truly godly people. But it's hard to get that old tune out of our heads.

This is insanity, isn't it, "To do the same thing over and over again, and expect different results." We wonder sometimes if we shouldn't be committed, complete with white, armless jackets and padded walls!

We know that if one drinks too much booze, he's going to have a hangover in the morning. But he keeps doing it. We know that if one always takes offense when someone disagrees with him, he'll ruin his relationships with those whom he loves. But his heart rages nonetheless. We know that if one is always working and never spending time with his family, his children will probably not be interested in spending time with him when he retires. But he keeps taking the overtime anyway. We hate putting on weight, and we know we shouldn't eat a sack of potato chips and a liter of Coke every night before we go to bed, but we keep on doing it!

Here's another sage expression: "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."

Paul wrote, **Romans 6:3-5, Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ We were buried therefore 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. 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.**

A three-year-old girl was watching a full-immersion baptism. Suddenly, to the horror of her parents, she let out a blood curdling scream: "Pastor pushed that man into the water?! Why'd he do that, Daddy?!" Her father tried to explain how the man's old spirit was being drowned with his sin. But the little girl screamed even louder, "Why didn't Pastor just spank him?"

In Baptism God doesn't spank us. He kills us! Everything that separated us from the love of God dies. We usually think about baptism in the category of LIFE, and rightly so. But first the Lord needs something to bring to life. Thus baptism begins with our immersion into Christ's death.

Jesus died on the Cross, but he didn't stay dead. And this is where the LIFE part of baptism comes into play. Jesus rose on the 3rd day, and with that eternal life became a reality for everyone who would cling to God's promises and believe that we are and will

be **“united with Him in a resurrection like His.”** Thus Paul boldly proclaimed, all this happened that we might **“walk in newness of life.”**

It's like getting rid of an old computer. You know, it's too slow, it crashes all the time, and it can't take the nifty new software and hardware. It is NOT fixable. It's a doorstop! But here's the new computer! All the latest bells & whistles. The sky's the limit with what we can do!

I think that's how Paul wants us to think about our new life in Christ. We've got the latest and greatest spiritual software & hardware the blood of Jesus can buy! So why don't we use it?!

Paul wrote, **Romans 6:6-7, 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.⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin.**

The difference between people who are slaves and those who are not boils down to one simple thing: FREEDOM. For the slave the path to freedom is death. Before Jesus was our savior that's what we had to look forward to, leaving this sorry world, to be free of its miseries and demands.

But we are NOT slaves! We've been liberated by the love of God! But, alas, we often act like slaves, don't we. Why? Out of habit? Because of an addiction? Because this is how I was raised? Because this is the way it's always been? Because I'm afraid of change? Because it's the easy way? But as Duane Johnson, “the Rock,” says, “I have a problem with problems”!

I remember Ted. He had just returned from a business trip and went to get his luggage off the carousel in the baggage claim at Chicago's O'Hare Airport. In a hurry, he ran to grab his bag just before it cycled through the canvas flaps into the back room and out the other side again.

Now one thing you need to know about Ted. Sometimes his health makes him a little shaky on his feet. So as he reached for his bag on the luggage carousel, he became dizzy, lost his balance, and fell onto it! So there he was, flat on his back, riding the conveyor through the flaps into the darkness hanging onto the handle of his suitcase over his head.

Several thoughts went through Ted's mind: First, "I've been wanting to do this for years!" And second, "I could get arrested!" And third, "Now is probably not the best time to get off!"

So he rode the belt, still gripping the handle of his suitcase, until he passed through the flaps again and into the light. At this point he looked up into the angry face of an official looking woman to whom he said, "Have you ever tried this?!" And she yelled, "No!" And he said, "Don't!" Then he swung his feet to the floor, tightened his grip on his suitcase, and quickly walked away.

Life is like that, isn't it. Somehow, perhaps without ever consciously intending to, we fall onto this moving belt, gripping our bag of stuff, a complete load of worthless baggage from our past, and we can't get off. Even though we're not going where we want, we just can't get off.

But Paul wrote, **Romans 6:8-11**, **Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.**⁹ **We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him.**¹⁰ **For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.**¹¹ **So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

What this means is that the Lord reached down and grabbed you by the scruff of the neck and pulled you clean off the conveyor belt of the heartache of this world before it was too late! And He did this because He loves you.

I think God's love is sometimes thought of as if it was an additive to an old car to keep the pistons firing. But it's not like that at all. God's love is a love that changes, transforms, enlightens, and lifts us up from the darkness and gives us life. It doesn't just sustain us and keep us moving, but it transform us. It makes us brand new. God's love is not an additive for your old way of life. It's a brand new engine for your new way of life!

The Scripture reads that Christ died, and with him we also died. But he also rose. So with him we also rise to a new life. The Scripture reads that Jesus cannot die again, and for that very reason we shall never taste the sting of death. The Scripture reads that death does not have dominion, mastery, nor rule over Christ. So too it does not have dominion, mastery, nor rule over you! You are no longer a slave to sin. You are free in Christ.

And to be free is our license to take hold of our lives as something to be cherished, something to be thankful for.

Friends in Christ, we've won the battle of our lives through our faith in Him who conquered death on the Cross.

Brothers and sisters, to be alive in Jesus does not mean that we have become perfect, sinless creatures. But it means that we are forgiven sinful creatures who are so very thankful for the love of God in His Son, Jesus.

This week, friends in Christ, every morning when we wake up, let us give thanks for the gift of life God has given us.

This week may you grow in your appreciation of this miraculous work God did in your body and in your heart through the waters of Holy Baptism.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this good news with your neighbor who struggles with fear, sin, death, and the devil, and who could use a word of encouragement, in the name of Jesus. Amen.