

January 12, 2020

Romans 6:1-11; Matthew 3:13-17:

“Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the water of your baptism, a name has been placed on you, and with the giving of this name, a new identity. At the baptismal font, the words are spoken, and they have life-changing power: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The name of the only God who saves us from sin, death, and hell is given. Faith receives this salvation and the new identity.

What's in a name? A name tells us who someone is and their will. There is a content to a name which makes a name into a revelation. A name is connected to what a person says and what a person does. Jesus himself, the Word in flesh is the name of God. If we would know the true God, all eyes must look to the one and only Son, Jesus of Nazareth. And the Holy Spirit continuously speaks of the Word made flesh in order that you may have receive Him and the Father. Jesus says the following to the apostles in the Gospel of St. John:

I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word ... I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them ... the Helper/Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 17:6, 26; 14:26).

If you want to know God, you are to look to Jesus. He is the manifestation of the name, the way in which the name is known. The Holy Spirit teaches everything regarding that name by giving it to the apostles who have written the name down in the Holy Scripture for all who will follow, as Jesus says, "for those who will believe in me through their word (John 17:20)." That's you and me!

What does it mean that the name has been placed on you in your baptism? Your identity is now understood in the identity of Jesus. Your baptism is understood in the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan and at the cross. When a woman is married, it is still generally the custom that she takes the name of her husband. Whoever the man was and is and all that he has is understood as hers. The life that he continues to live she lives with him. What she was and is, and all that she brings with her, she gives to him. They are understood in marriage as one.

In the case of Jesus, he brings to us his righteousness. In our case, we bring to him our unrighteousness. In his baptism, the sinless Son of God becomes sin for us. In our baptism, sinners become washed clean of all sin. Consequently, baptism is described in this way by the apostle Paul:

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy ... (Titus 3:4-8a).

Indeed! The first thing to understand about our identity in baptism is that we have moved from a “guilty” verdict to “not guilty” verdict. Our sins have been washed away, and by faith in the forgiveness of sins we receive a good conscience (1 Pet. 3:21). He has saved us! Having restored his sight, Ananias says to Saul, who will later be known as Paul: “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:16).”

When you were baptized you “put on Christ.” Those are not my words, but the words of the apostle Paul: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).” What exactly does that mean? Jesus answers this in Luke 12:50 when he talks about his baptism in this very revealing way. He says, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how pressed I am still it be completed.” The baptism of the Jordan is well over at this point in the gospel account, but the reality of the Jordan is not. When Jesus goes to the Jordan to be baptized it is to be a completed reality on the cross. At the cross, what takes place at the Jordan is finished.

The power of our baptism is from the baptism of Jesus that was completed at the cross where his becoming sin for us was the death of sin. Can we then be baptized with the baptism with which Jesus was baptized? The answer is “yes,” and we are. In fact, Jesus answers that very question in Mark 10:35-45 where Jesus tells James and John, “the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.” The baptism that we receive is powered by the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan and has been completed at the cross of Calvary. Christ’s baptism and your baptism are related through the cross. They are alike in that they are connected to a dying and a burial and furthermore, a ratification of the cross in a resurrection from the dead - newness of life. As Peter says, “Baptism ... now saves you ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ... (1 Pet. 3:21).”

Through the cross, Jesus’ baptism is the reverse of ours. In other words, in his baptism, Jesus takes our sin to the cross, buries our sin in his death, and rises from the dead to assure us that all has been truly done. Our baptism is not merely an empty symbol that we are members of a church, but it actually offers and gives something wonderful. Kurt Marquart writes:

We may think of our Lord’s baptism as a great tide that washes the world’s sins onto Him and sweeps Him (and them) to the cross. It is precisely at His baptism, therefore, that Jesus stands revealed as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). From the cross, however, flows to us the saving tide of our baptisms (1 Pt. 3:20-21!), full of God’s mercy, forgiveness, and life. [*The Saving Truth*, Vol. 1, page 89]

As you can see, baptism is a participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul writes in our epistle lesson: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.” Baptism gives what Christ has gained when he became sin for us at his own Baptism. Jesus gives us forgiveness. And where there is forgiveness, there is also life and salvation.

Dying to Sin, Rising in Christ is the theme of our message today. Having been united with Jesus in a death like his, we will be united with him in a resurrection like his. Even now, Paul writes, we are to “consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11).” We are a new creation, which again takes us to the concept of our ongoing identity. The old has passed away and the new has come who through Christ God reconciled us to himself (2 Cor. 5:17-18). We have “put on” Christ and we are “in Christ,” as Paul states.

The believer’s life is not his own. We live in Christ as Christ lives in us, that is, Jesus lives out his own life, death, and resurrection through every baptized child of God every day. This is truly a miraculous thing in the Christian life - that the death and resurrection of Christ so touches us that we die to sin with Jesus on the cross and are raised with him unto newness of life. With this truth we can say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the live I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).”

What all of this means is that Jesus himself is the real power at work in our lives. He saves us by his pardon, and in that pardon we are transformed. “I am the vine,” Jesus states, “you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5).” By water and the Spirit, God forgives our sins, gives us new birth, and radically transforms our lives into a daily **Dying to Sin, Rising in Christ**. That means that every day is the death of sin in us and the strengthening and preserving of the newness of life. Baptism is the beginning and the living of a radically new life that will be fully completed on the day when we are with the Lord forever.

Luther writes in the Small Catechism: “[Baptism] indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” **Dying to Sin, Rising in Christ** is Baptism’s signature on the whole Christian life - our Identity - who we are and our will. By Baptism we share by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. As he has tossed our sins into the grave, so we daily overcome and bury sins in his forgiveness. And as He has risen from the dead and lives, so we too continually live a new life in Him! As our sermon hymn so powerfully stated: “All that I am and love most dearly - Receive it all, O Lord, from me. Let me confess my faith sincerely; Help me Your faithful child to be! Let nothing that I am or own Serve any will but yours alone.”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott