

January 12, 2025

Romans 6:1-11

“You Have the Power of Jesus!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

You Have the Power of Jesus! The devil would have us misuse and abuse the good news of Jesus and his great gift of baptism, which washes away our sins. We Lutherans are frequently accused of misusing and abusing the gospel and baptism.

The Roman church loves to accuse us of having no sense of good works. They tell us that we should do good works with the understanding that they are necessary to save us. They believe that baptism only washes away sins done before it, and that other vehicles and works are necessary for God to see us as good people who are deserving of heaven, though Paul clearly writes in Eph. 2:8-9, that our salvation "... is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

On the flip side, most Protestant churches don't even believe in the power of baptism but rant and rave about how it should be done and how important it is to keep children far away from it as if it were a harmful thing. One might conclude that the Protestant churches of our day are completely opposed to children being brought into the kingdom of heaven, as they roundly condemn us for baptizing children according to Christ's institution and in keeping with the practice of the apostolic church.

Now, Lutherans do have a problem. We have such a clear and firm understanding that we are saved by Jesus Christ alone in the word of the gospel and in the visible gospel of baptism that we tend to take it all for granted. Because of the sinful desires of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life we do tend to misuse and abuse the good news of Jesus and his great gift of baptism which washes away all of our sins. Paul writes in our epistle lesson for this morning: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" Paul responds: "By *no* means!" Some Lutherans might prefer: "By *all* means!" Some see the forgiveness of Jesus as a permission to do whatever they want.

But Jesus did not die on the cross to pay for our sins and wash them all away in baptism so that we could joyfully and freely sin and have the best of what both good and evil have to offer. In the first epistle of John (3:5) the apostle writes: "You know that he [Jesus] appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin." This idea that Jesus is our free ticket to have evil down here and paradise up above is simply one of the most ludicrous things that our sinful nature has ever concocted.

Most people have heard of Rasputin even if one has never studied Russian history. He was the Russian monk - an evil charlatan - who is credited by many historians as having had a major hand in the downfall of the Romanov family and the rise of communism. Rasputin taught and personally lived the teaching that since those who sin the most require the most forgiveness, one should enthusiastically and without restraint sin and do whatever you want, because every time you repent, you receive much more of God's forgiving grace than the ordinary, everyday sinner.

Now, I believe that most people would never express it or practice it as blatantly as was done by Rasputin, but what we see in him is what Paul is addressing when he says: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" May it never come to be! The apostle goes on to give us a statement as to the reason

why. He writes: “How can we who died to sin still live in it? 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.” Notice that this statement of Paul does not speak about something that we have done, but of something that was done to us. We were baptized, and in baptism we died to sin, we were buried with him, and as Jesus was raised we too might walk in newness of life. What happened to us in our baptism is designed to give us a new identity in Jesus and sever our connection with sin. Sin, though we still have it and struggle with it every day, is not to be in charge. **You Have the Power of Jesus!**

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” Those words help us immensely to understand what Paul is saying about baptism. Our baptism isn’t some meaningless or empty command that only indicates that we have now joined the church. **You Have the Power of Jesus!** And again, this isn’t a work we do. This is the work of God in our lives today and touches our lives forever.

Our baptism has connected or united us to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Naturally, we can’t help but to ask how this can be? The answer is this: Since Jesus died for all, when we are touched by him in baptism, we also die to ourselves. In Jesus’ death, sin was destroyed - it died in him. Being united to Jesus and thereby touched by his death, sin has no other choice but to die in us. Sin first dies in us when it is exposed for what it is and what it has done to us so that we despair of ourselves and any notion that we can save ourselves. This brings us to the greater dying to sin when we are regenerated, and faith arises to receive the death of Jesus as a washing away of sins.

What does it mean to be buried with Christ? The burial of Jesus makes it plain that the death of Jesus was a very real death because he became sin for us - and his old body was buried - for he himself and his body was done with sin. As our participation in his death is the death of sin in us, so do we share in his burial as a burial of the old person. The old person in us is done away with just as we would bury any body that is dead. Our text states: “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. For one who has died has been set free from sin.” **You Have the Power of Jesus!**

It is amazing to consider that when we are baptized we are also touched by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In the washing away of our sins, we are given new life, even so that we may say that we have been set free from sin. When Jesus touches us with the washing away of our sins, we rise to newness of life, though all of this is invisible to the world. A new us emerges from his life so that our life is no longer ours, but is a new life that is thankfully lived in Jesus and for him. We walk out of the grave as a new person. What we have in Jesus is a powerful, dynamic reality. I know that sometimes it doesn’t feel that way because of our weaknesses. But we are to believe it is so!

At this point, I want to ask you a question that I believe will help to make it clear as to what Paul is trying to teach us in this section. Who has the right to give commands - the dog or his master? What

a stupid question to ask! Certainly, we would have to respond by saying that it is the master who tells the dog what to do. Anything else would be silly. Paul wants to remind us that because of our union with Christ in the cleansing waters of baptism, sin should not be allowed to rule over us. We should never allow the dog to put a leash on us and walk us around. As Paul writes in Romans 6:11-12, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.”

So, what are we then to do with this gospel proclamation of our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ in baptism? The most important thing is to believe that it is true about yourself - that you really have miraculously died and risen with Jesus unto newness of life. Consider yourselves as having died to sin in the washing of forgiveness. The old you has been buried. Now a new you is alive for God in a union with Christ who is your everything. Since you have been baptized at his command and promise, your participation in his death and resurrection is authentic. **You Have the Power of Jesus!**

Since Jesus is done with sin and now lives to God, he sets us free for a life lived to God, and a body that can be presented to God as a living sacrifice. The body has become the expressive instrument of our will to worship God and do his will. And when it often doesn't feel that way, consider what has been given to you in your baptism. **You Have the Power of Jesus!** Like I said, sometimes it doesn't feel that way because of our weaknesses, but when we are weak we find our strength in Jesus. Faith in the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven are greater than the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life. As Jesus says (John 8:36), “... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott