

LIFE IN AND UNDER JESUS

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Lutheran Church of the Cross

Rev. Brian Stolarczyk

Our text is from Romans chapter 6:

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.

One of Jesus' most well-known parables is the story of the prodigal son...the boy who wanders off and squanders all his possessions in wild living. When he hits rock bottom, he humbly returns home to his father to seek a living as a slave. He is instead welcomed back as a long-lost son who was dead but now is alive.

But imagine if there was a part two to this story. A year or two after his father's warm welcome, the son's life returns to normal and even his older brother tolerates having him around again. He remembers that happy day he came up the road and his father came running to greet him. He wonders what would happen if he did it again. Why not help myself to my father's possessions again, and run away for a few weeks. And then later I could play the penitent son and come back again? Maybe I will get another party! Sound absurd? Unthinkable? Don't you believe it. That's exactly what a great many people think. "God will forgive me, that's his job!"

Today we continue our series on the book of Romans chapters 5-8. If you look at chapter 6, you will see that one question holds the chapter together. Verse 1: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" This is repeated in Verse 15: "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" The very next verses introduces two images that St. Paul uses to respond to those questions. The image of dying to sin in verse 2, and the image of slavery to sin or to Christ in verse 16.

LIFE IN JESUS

Baptism links us with Christ's death and crucifixion:

³ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁸ 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.

It appears that the heart of his message is his commands/rules to believers in Rome:

¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

Yet when we try to overcome our sin on our own, we invariably end up failing. It is God's work in Baptism that brings about a change. Paul does NOT talk about baptism as an empty church ritual. It is not a work that we do to show some inward change. Paul talks about it as a means of God's grace. Baptism supernaturally connects us with Jesus crucifixion and death, but more than that, his resurrection and life!

It is Baptism that helps us understand verses 11-14 in the right context. The English word "consider" that Paul uses is an accounting term. It means "to do the sums" or "count items up;" "to determine by mathematical process." It is related to the Greek words for "reckon" and "calculate." We are to count up or consider the value of our baptism. We are encouraged to trust that we were joined with Jesus in his death SO THAT we today can live in his resurrection power over sin.

LIFE UNDER JESUS

Beginning with verse 15, Paul picks up the second theme of slavery to sin or a life lived under the authority of Jesus. We may have some trouble relating to the image of slavery as American Christians. We experience the freedom to worship, freedom to pursue a career, and freedom to raise our family relatively free from state control. And yet even "free people" can experience profound slavery. Consider the alcoholic or the chain smoker. Imagine if they were suddenly granted the freedom to drink and smoke anywhere or at anytime or in any quantity. On the one hand they would be very free. But if they still did not have the power to stop or put the drink or cigarette down, how free are they? So it is with anyone who cannot rein in their anger, lust, or greed. For anyone who cannot control their tongue or the impulses of their heart, they are just as enslaved to sin as the smoker or alcoholic.

Paul's image of slavery:

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that, by their baptism, they were under the reign of Jesus rather than sin. They were not required to submit to the slavery of their sinful nature. They were baptized and were free to submit themselves to the righteousness that leads to life.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.