

Ash Wednesday
February 14, 2024

QUESNEL

“Baptized into Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:1-11)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

- and I have been “Baptized into Christ Jesus.”
 - As such,
 - we have received the bountiful grace
 - and abundant forgiveness of God,
 - washing away all our sins
 - and assuring us of everlasting life,
 - all of this free of charge.
- But this raises the question:
 - Your baptismal certificate:
 - Is it a license to sin?
 - Or is it a death certificate?

Here is what I mean.

Because God’s grace is so free and abundant,

- because our Father loves to forgive us for the sake of his Son,
 - some might mistakenly think that this gives us
 - a “Get Out of Jail Free” card
 - that we can use anytime as a license to sin.
- “Wanna sin?” the tempter’s voice comes.
 - “Go ahead! God will forgive you!”
 - So we abuse God’s grace,
 - in advance,
 - to willfully go ahead
 - and block out the Spirit’s voice
 - and follow a way we know
 - to be wrong.
- God’s grace,
 - given us in baptism,
 - is turned into a license to sin.
 - What a deception and distortion!

And this is a frequent accusation that Christians have faced:

- that preaching free grace
 - gives people an open invitation to sin.
 - It has especially been leveled against us Lutherans:
 - Because you Lutherans so emphasize salvation by grace,
 - apart from works,
 - does not this open people up
 - to take advantage of free forgiveness
 - and use it precisely as a license to sin?

But even in the days of the New Testament,

- St. Paul had to counter this distortion of grace.
 - St. Paul's message of free grace in Christ
 - could be summed up as
 - "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."
- St. Paul himself says this very thing at the end of Romans 5.
 - But immediately Paul anticipates the objection that this free grace could be misused as a license to sin, and he addresses that question in our text for tonight, from Romans 6. He writes: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!"

Catch the forcefulness in St. Paul's rejection of such a twisted notion:

- "By no means!"
 - This is the most emphatic negative
 - that Paul could come up with. "By no means!" "God forbid!"
 - "No way, Jose!" we might say.
 - No, no way are we supposed to presume
 - upon God's grace like that!

And St. Paul gives the reason why.

- He says: "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."

You see, your baptismal certificate

- is not to be taken as a license to sin.

- By no means! Rather,
 - it is a death certificate.
 - And you are the person who died.

Dear Christian,

- when you were baptized into Christ,
 - you were baptized into His death.
 - You have been crucified with Christ.
- By this I mean your old sinful self,
 - who hates God
 - and loves to sin
 - and loves to come up with excuses to sin
 - you the sinner were put to death with Jesus,
 - who died on that cross for your sins.
- Christ shed his blood for you
 - to win forgiveness for all your sins,
 - which he has done,
 - thanks be to God!
- This forgiveness is then applied to you
 - when you are baptized,
 - washing away your sins.
 - Again, thanks be to God!

But the fact that God's Son,

- bearing our sins,
 - died on the cross,
 - forsaken by his Father
 - this should show you also how God regards sin.
 - He hates it!
- Is this how we show our thanks to God,
 - by willingly persisting in the very sins
 - for which Christ died?
 - No way! By no means!

You baptism was your death and burial.

- The old sinner that you are
 - was put under the water, drowned.
 - "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.”

This calls for repentance.

- That is what this penitential season of Lent is for.
 - It is a time to especially realize our deep-set sinfulness.
 - That old Adam does not want to stay under the water
 - he fights against it,
 - kicking and screaming!
- are called during Lent
 - to grieve over our taking advantage of God’s grace,
 - abusing it.
 - What rotten sinners we are!
 - Do you feel it?
 - Do you know it?
 - Do you see it in yourself?

On this Ash Wednesday

- we wear the dust of repentance,
 - marked on our heads.
 - Our sin, our continued sinning,
 - would kill us, doom us to death.
- But the ashes take the shape of the cross,
 - showing us how we are delivered from death,
 - namely, by the cross of Christ,
 - who died in our place.
- So realize also the unfathomable grace of God,
 - that in spite of our abuse,
 - in spite of our ungratefulness,
 - our gracious God, rich in mercy,
 - continues to forgive,
 - continues to call us home to Himself.
- This is no license to go on sinning.
 - No, this is an ever-new realization
 - of how much God loves us
 - and is determined to stay with us.
- That is how deep the grace of God goes.
 - His mercy moves us to draw near to Him,

- to renounce our sinful ways,
 - to bathe in His baptismal grace,
 - and to live a new life
 - by the power of His Spirit.

Yes, your baptismal certificate is both a death certificate

- and a birth certificate!
 - Death to the sinner!
 - New life in Christ!
 - Baptism does double duty.
 - St. Paul writes:
 - *“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.”*
- There it is!
 - Newness of life!
 - Newborn people of God
 - That is us!
 - God gives us a new way to live,
 - now that we have been raised with Christ.
 - And He gives us the power to do it.

Baptism takes us from death to life.

- The old man of sin dies and is buried.
 - The new man in Christ rises and lives.
 - It happened in your baptism,
 - once and for all,
 - and for many of us that event took place long, long ago.
 - But your baptism is,
 - at the same time,
 - ever new,
 - a daily reality.
 - We live from, and we live in, our baptism.
 - There is a daily dying and rising that takes place.
 - Die, you old sinner!
 - Rise up and live,
 - you new saint in Christ!

Dying and rising, every day.

- Every time that sinful desire,
 - whatever it is
 - whatever would lead you away from God
 - and tune out His voice
 - each time that happens,
 - God’s Spirit,
 - given you in your baptism,
 - will call you to put that desire to death.
- Die and die again, old Adam!
 - And with that dying
 - will come the grace to rise up and live,
 - live in new ways,
 - ways taught by the Spirit.
 - That is how daily repentance works.
 - Dying and rising with Christ.

What will this look like in your life?

- I do not know your specific temptations,
 - your besetting sins.
 - But I do know God’s commandments,
 - and I know the multi-varied creativity of the devil,
 - the world, and our flesh
 - to come up with a thousand different ways to break
 - God’s commandments
 - and to come up with the rationalizations
 - for doing so.
- Pay attention to God’s commandments.
 - They boil down to loving the Lord
 - with everything that is in you
 - and loving your neighbor as much as you love yourself
 - that is it in a nutshell.
- Pay attention when you start doing the rationalization bit:
 - “Oh, I ought to be able to do this because. . . .”
 - And pay attention to the Spirit’s voice
 - when He sounds the warning alarm in your conscience,
 - and take heed.
 - God is calling you to die and rise again.
 - That is repentance.

Friends, you have been baptized into Christ Jesus.

- Does this make your baptismal certificate a license to sin?
 - No way! By no means!
 - Rather, your baptism is both a death certificate
 - and a certificate of live birth.
 - You have been buried with Christ, your Saviour,
 - who died for you to set you free from your sins,
 - both their condemning guilt
 - and their enslaving power.
- Your baptism would put that old Adam back down in the water
 - every time he rears his ugly head.
 - But dear one,
 - you have also been raised with Christ to newness of life.
- You are alive in Christ,
 - really living now,
 - responsive to God’s Spirit.

It is as you learned in the Catechism:

- “What does such baptizing with water indicate?
 - It 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.”

Brothers and sisters,

- you have been baptized into Christ Jesus,
 - baptized into His death and His resurrection.
 - This is the Lenten life of the Christian.
 - It happens on Ash Wednesday, yes,
 - but also on Ash Thursday,
 - and Ash Friday
 - you get the idea.
- This daily dying and rising with Christ
 - will continue every day of this life,
 - until that great day
 - when there will be no more dying,
 - only rising
 - on the great Easter rising-up to come!

AMEN

This sermon was prepared for the Divine Service at Trinity Lutheran Church, Quesnel, BC and was presented on February 14, 2024, the day we celebrated Ash Wednesday. If you have questions or comments please feel free to call or text Pastor Alan Visser at (250) 552-4685.