

## **“Baptized Into the Resurrection” – Romans 6:1-11**

*Baptism of our Lord – January 8, 2012*

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Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Epistle appointed for this baptism of our Lord, from St. Paul’s letter to Rome, chapter six.

My dear family in Christ, there are certain things that are simply mutually exclusive. Such things might seem to the uninitiated to be similar, but when you are in the know you know they do not belong together: they can hardly be considered in the same mind. Perhaps one of these sets describes you, or your opposite: If I am a John Deere fan, how could I ever contemplate owning anything New Holland? If I live and die by Tony Stewart’s results, how could I ever cheer Carl Edwards or Kevin Harvick? If I am a Star Wars devotee, how could I ever go back to Star Trek? If I am a strings player, how could I ever contemplate playing percussion, or worse yet, brass?

It is that kind of duplicity that St. Paul addresses in this chapter to the church in Rome. If I am a new man in Christ, risen from the dead with Him, how on earth could I go on in my former sinful life’s ways? Oh, but the Romans have been asking a seemingly plausible, even pious question. If, as St. Paul had taught, no matter how great your sins are, God’s grace always abounds to cover them, wouldn’t it be a good idea to sin more so that God can be even more magnanimous in His forgiving grace? More sins, requiring more forgiveness, coming from more grace which reveals God to be simply that much more impressive.

Sounds like it might be holy, wanting God to come off looking ever better for having forgiven more and more, but that's really our old self that's asking the question. It's really the part of us that wants to get away with more and more.

Consider the possibilities: one could do all sorts of things one might have entertained doing in the past, but thought better of it. Perhaps really giving it to that person who sticks in your craw, without having to think about what you're saying just letting it fly; or helping yourself to the till or the supply cabinet at work; or plowing through all sorts of places on the internet where you know you shouldn't be; or sleeping off the New Year's Eve hangover on Sunday morning.

But who is it inside of us that even finds those ideas attractive? It's the old sinful self that pushes those agenda.

St. Paul, to this and to the Romans says, "**No way! May it never be!**" Sin separates the believer from Christ. Sin is a rejection of the life God designed for His people and, as such, cannot be so cavalierly entertained. What's more, baptism into Christ Jesus' death and resurrection has caused that old self to be drowned, cut off.

Jesus died to atone for our sins – every last one of those sins – so that God's grace does always cover what we have committed. There is forgiveness for those poorly considered words that cut another child of God, the over-indulgence which led to breaking the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment, the embezzlement, the ill-conceived dabbling in pornography, or even the adultery which is part and parcel to it.

But Jesus also died and rose again in victory to deliver us from sin. We are baptized into Jesus' death to sin, literally drowned to the sin that once removed us from the family of God and enslaved us. And we have been raised to a new life in Him.

Some years ago, a man by the name of Jon Metz moved from his urban dwelling in New Haven, CT, to an old home he had purchased in the suburbs. One day, as he was working on the boiler-style furnace in the basement of this fixer-upper, his arm become lodged in the furnace. The harder Jon worked to extricate the arm, the more the arm swelled and he found that he was thoroughly trapped. Trapped like this for two days, Jon realized the situation had worsened. In his exertion to free himself, he had cut his arm on the old, filthy, rusty furnace and now the infection's poisons were working their way through his system. That arm, so dear to him as it would be to any one of us, was on the verge of costing Jon his life. In an act reminiscent of the fellow out in the desert who got pinned between boulders, Jon was able to reach his tools. He fashioned a tourniquet as best he could and amputated his arm. The doctors later agreed that what Jon had done had spared him his life. That was a tremendous cost to pay, but it did bring life where death was going to be the only outcome.

You and I have risen to new life in Christ through our baptism into Him. It was our God and Father Who "cut off" His only-begotten Son, Jesus, on Calvary's cross so that we might have life now and forever as children of God. Jesus was infected with our sins and enslaved to our judgment and death. Such had to be removed and God was the only One Who could possible have accomplished that for us. By His sacrifice, we have been raised to new life in Jesus' resurrection and our holy and righteous discipleship is a fruit of faith, an expression of the Holy Spirit at work in us.

We are called by God and exhorted by St. Paul to rise to a new life in Christ Jesus, a life which is completely different from the old life we would live without Him. When Lazarus came forth from the tomb after Jesus called him to new life (John 11:43-44), the grave clothes were removed from him. We are called to cast off our former lives and to live as we are clothed in Jesus.

**If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. <sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry...<sup>1</sup> <sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.**<sup>2</sup> (Colossians 3:1-5,12-14). (We are further called to put on the armor of God to take our stand against Satan's schemes.)

To walk in the newness of life can take on as many forms as people in this place. There is only one Christ and one baptism into Him, but there is no limit to the variety of ways in which that might be revealed in your life.

How do love or compassion ordinarily make themselves known in your daily circles? Is it in asking the welfare of your coworkers – taking the time to listen to them as they reveal the illness of their parents; is it in the firm yet tender way in which you help your children to grow in accountability and discipleship, or in the humble patience you exhibit before the cashier who is having just a miserable time of it, today?

In Christ, everyone is a new creation, the old is gone and the new has come, and we are called to live in that newness of life. Some days can seem mighty stale and tiring with sin's

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<sup>1</sup>The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001 (Col 3:1-5). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>2</sup>The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001 (Col 3:12-14). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

difficulties and temptations, but we have the wondrous invitation to call upon Him Who was tempted in every way as we are but was without sin. Jesus is the One Who can empathize and in Whom we can draw strength.

How can we live in the old ways, when the new way lies before us? We can live in the newness of life because we are in Christ and with Christ.

Amen.