

“Dying to Sin”

June 25, 2017 Lakewood UMC

Romans 6:1b-11

Dying to sin. This made me think of how many times we say that we are dying to do something. “I am dying to go on vacation” or “I am dying to see that concert” or “I am dying to get a new car” but not many of us say we are “dying to sin.” Maybe we should be...ok...not in quite that context. But that is what Paul thought the Christians that he was talking to might be thinking.

Our reading from Romans today is rather interesting. The first thing that we need to know about it is that Paul is responding to something from chapter 5 where it said “where sin abounded, grace super-abounded.” Paul is having an argument of sorts wondering what the people were thinking. His first question is rhetorical.... “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”... maybe like something we might say to our own children. “Well if Joe told you to jump in the lake would you do it?” Sort of a sarcastic question, as we already know the answer.

When I read a lesson to prepare a message, I like to read different translations so let’s listen to this one from the Living Bible.

“Well then, shall we keep on sinning so that God can keep on showing us more and more kindness and forgiveness?”

²⁻³ Of course not! Should we keep on sinning when we don't have to? For sin's power over us was broken when we became Christians and were baptized to become a part of Jesus Christ; through his death the power of your sinful nature was shattered. ⁴ Your old sin-loving nature was buried with him by baptism when he died; and when God the Father, with glorious power, brought him back to life again, you were given his wonderful new life to enjoy.

⁵ For you have become a part of him, and so you died with him, so to speak, when he died; [\[a\]](#) and now you share his new life and shall rise as he did. ⁶ Your old evil desires were nailed to the cross with him; that part of you that loves to sin was crushed and fatally wounded, so that your sin-loving body is no longer under sin's control, no longer needs to be a slave to sin; ⁷ for when you are deadened to sin you are freed from all its allure and its power over you. ⁸ And since your old sin-loving nature "died" with Christ, we know that you will share his new life. ⁹ Christ rose from the dead and will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. ¹⁰ He died once for all to end sin's power, but now he lives forever in unbroken fellowship with God. ¹¹ So look upon your old sin nature as dead and unresponsive to sin, and instead be alive to God, alert to him, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

So Paul is trying to think like those that he was teaching might when he has his argument with an imaginary opponent. William Barclay suggests it might have gone something like this:

Opponent: You have just said the God's grace is great enough to find forgiveness for every sin.

Paul: That is so.

Opponent: You are, in fact, saying that God's grace is the most wonderful thing in all the world.

Paul: This is so.

Opponent: Well, if that is so, let us go on sinning. The more we sin, the more grace will abound. Sin does not matter for God will forgive us anyway. In fact, we can go further than that and say that sin is an excellent thing, because it gives the grace of God a chance to operate. The conclusion of your argument is that sin produces grace; therefore sin is bound to be a good thing if it produces the greatest thing in the world.

Now you can probably imagine Paul's reaction to that. Well, we don't have to imagine it. Paul says "are you kidding me? Do you mean to suggest that we shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² God forbid! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Have we

forgotten what happened when we were baptized?” For Paul there was no such thing as a sinful baptized person. It just wasn’t possible for someone who had died to sin to keep on sinning!

This really got me thinking so I started to do a little research on baptism. Quite interesting, by the way. Back in early times baptism was a little different than what we know in our church today. First of all, it was not a new thing with John the Baptist. It was practiced by many different pagan religions and was based on the belief that water had purifying properties. It was also practiced by the Greeks and in Judaism as a cleansing ritual but did not have quite the same meaning as it does for us today. It wasn’t until John the Baptist arrived on the scene that it began to take on a different meaning. It was not based on Jewish beliefs or pagan customs as the people were used to. This baptism was for the remission of sins and it was authorized by God.

The word “baptism” itself meant “to plunge, immerse or wash.” So adult baptism, or what some may call “believer’s baptism” was how it was performed. People were baptized when they joined the church by confession of faith. And it was total immersion. This was to symbolize our “dying to sin” and then our “rebirth” as a Christian. Think about that for a minute. In fact, close your eyes and image being in a river or even Lake

Erie. The pastor pushes your head under the water, as if being buried, and then pulls you up, rising from the water, as if rising from the grave. Dying to one kind of life and rising to another. Dying to sin and rising in new life in Christ. As John Wesley explained it, dying to sin means being "[f]reed both from the guilt and from the power of it." We were slaves to sin but the water of baptism has freed us from that slavery.

All of us are born "in" or "into" sin. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1 that before we become Christians, we are all "dead in [our] transgressions and sins." He doesn't mean that we are physically dead but spiritually dead in that we have not experienced new life in Christ. The Reformation theologian John Calvin in his commentary on Ephesians 2:1 says "He [Paul] does not mean simply that they were in danger of death; but he declares that it was a real and present death under which they labored. As spiritual death is nothing else than the alienation of the soul from God, we are all born as dead men, and we live as dead men, until we are made partakers of the life of Christ."

We are born dead in sin because of the first sin of Adam. As Roman's 5:12 says "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned--"

Sin separates us from God. If we haven't experienced new life in Christ then we will be unable to produce spiritual fruit. Imagine a person that has not died to sin as a dead branch broken from a tree in a storm. Where it lies on the ground, separated from its source of nourishment, it will never again produce tender buds or green leaves or sweet fruit.

Separated from its source of nourishment...isn't that what God is for us? If we have not died to sin, are we not also separated from our source of nourishment? As Jesus says in John 12:24 "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, *it bears much fruit*"

Baptism is the way we go from being dead "in" sin to being dead "to" sin. It is how we become one with Christ. It is how we live in Him and for Him.

Paul says in verses 5-7 "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,^[a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."

Dying to sin...is it starting to sound better to you now?

When new members are joining our church by confession of faith do you remember what PB does if they have already been baptized? He sprinkles

water on them and says “Remember your baptism.” How many of you can say that you remember your baptism? Most of us were baptized as infants so we can’t really remember the specifics like the time, the place, the ritual or who was present. What he really means when he says that is “remember who you are” or “remember whose you are.” We belong to the Father now...we are one with Christ.

If we have truly died to sin we are free from its hold on us and we have received the undeserved gift of God’s grace.

We are in Christ.

I know that I will never look at baptism the same again so let me leave you with this:

We cannot live our physical life unless we are in the air and the air is in us: unless we are in Christ, and Christ is in us, we cannot live the life of God.