

**+ Romans 6:3-11 + Baptized into a New Life in Christ + Series: What Does This Mean? +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY +
+ 16th Sunday after Pentecost + 24 September 2017 +**

What makes a story great? Think of a movie you can't stop watching or a book you just can't put down. What makes that story great? Is it the plot? The character development? The unexpected twists and turns and curveballs or is it simply how that story connects you with someone in the story?

For example, let's take the account of our Savior's death and resurrection. Each of us can connect with someone in the story. Perhaps you connect with Peter who denied his Lord under pressure, but who eagerly received Christ's forgiveness. Perhaps you connect with the thief on the cross as you look back and realize how much you deserve hell, but Jesus promises you heaven. Perhaps you connect with the women at Jesus' tomb, shocked to find it empty, but eager to tell everyone about it. Perhaps you connect with Thomas who doubted the testimony that Jesus was alive, but still received the Savior's grace.

You and I connect with all kinds of people in the account of Jesus' death and resurrection, but who of us would connect with the focus of that account—Jesus? "How can I connect with him? He's not sinful like me. Yes, he's human, but he's also God. How can I connect with him?"

The truth is, you are connected with Jesus. You were connected to his death and resurrection when baptismal waters made holy by God's Word were poured over your head. You were **BAPTIZED INTO A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST**.

There's an old spiritual in our hymnal that asks: ***"Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" "Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?" "Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?"*** After each question, the hymnwriter remarks, ***"It causes me to tremble..."*** (*Christian Worship* 119)

So were you there when Jesus dragged a heavy, wooden cross to a hill outside of Jerusalem? Well, no. Were you there when the soldiers pounded nails through his hands and feet into the wooden beams? No. Were you there when he gave up his spirit and died? No. Were you there when two of his friends quickly buried him in a borrowed tomb? No! No matter how old you might feel, none of us were alive when those events actually took place. None of us can say we were physically there, but in a certain sense, we all were!

What causes each of us to tremble, to lose sleep, to feel restless? Sin. The prophet Isaiah, who lived 700 years before the birth of Christ, trembled when he pondered what Jesus would endure for his sin. ***"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed...."*** (53:5-6)

Were you there? Yes, you were through baptism. You see, your sins—the big ones and the little ones, the public ones and the secret ones, the ones you remember and the ones you don't—those sins were the reason Jesus went to the cross. As the sinless Son of God, Jesus never deserved death. You did! You deserved God's eternal punishment for your life of willing disobedience. You should have suffered the Savior's excruciating death. Every day we all deserve more death earning it like a paycheck that keeps growing and growing with every wicked thought, word and action. It causes us to tremble, because Jesus bore it all for us.

When Jesus died, he took all your sins and placed them on his own shoulders...and you know what? Those sins died with him. In fact, when he was buried in that tomb, your sin and death went in there with him. His sacrifice, his payment for your sins was complete. ***"The death he died, he died to sin once for all..."*** Sin was buried with him, but three days later, what came out of that tomb? Was it the guilt of your loveless thoughts and hurtful words and selfish actions? Was it a victorious Satan arm-in-arm with Death eager for a hell filled with us? No, the living Jesus left the tomb empty! ***"For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him."***

What comfort! What hope! What peace! What certainty in an uncertain world lost without this absolute truth—Jesus lives! He died to sin once for all, but death no longer has mastery over him. You'll find the tombs of sinful human teachers like Mohammed or Joseph Smith or Buddha, but you won't ever find Jesus. Why? Jesus lives and reigns forever! Through baptism, Jesus connects you with his death and resurrection. ***"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."***

We see it time and again at baptismal fonts like ours. Parents bring a sinfully blind, spiritually dead enemy of God to the font. There through a few drops of water poured over that child's head in the name of the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit, Jesus gives sight, life, and the status of being a dear child of his heavenly Father to that little one. He did that for you! Perhaps you were an infant brought to the font in your parent's arms. Perhaps you were older, but still the same miracle took place! In baptism, you and I died to sin with Christ. In baptism, our sins were buried with Christ and his forgiveness. In baptism, we were made alive in Christ Jesus. We were reborn! It wasn't something you did, but a miracle Jesus performed within you.

Jesus connected you to his death and resurrection through water and his almighty Word. How awesome to be part of all that! Through baptism, you are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, but what does that mean?

“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

Going back to your sins, which were crucified and buried with Christ, is like making your bedroom in a crypt among corpses and bones. Why would you want to go back to the old way of things, the old weaknesses and sins that once trapped you and filled your nostrils with dead, poisonous air? Why would you want to leave the land of the living to dwell with the dead? Jesus isn't going back. He's not going to die again. He doesn't need to. Why should you?

...But so often we do! So often we fall back into those old sins we used to know and love. So often we give in again to those same old temptations and pander to the same old weaknesses. So often we tell the Lord, “I can't handle being dead to sin! I can't handle the struggle with temptation. It's just too much, so let me just get comfortable back here in the graveyard.” No! You can handle the struggle—not because you're so strong, but because your old sinful self was crucified and buried with Christ. With Jesus' complete forgiveness, sin is no longer your master. You are free from death's power! Why go back to the graveyard and become a spiritual zombie again?

Yes, being dead to sin means challenging change for your life. It means not going back where you know you'll be tempted to fall back into sin. It means not giving in when your sinful nature craves action. It even means examining and changing your lifestyle and priorities, if necessary, but all of that is possible only because in baptism, you were raised with Jesus to live a new life. Because of Christ and what he has done for you through baptism, you could get up this morning as God's own forgiven child after a yesterday of sin. You can live in a way pleasing to God. Your old self isn't in charge any longer, but your new self, made alive through Christ, arises anew each day.

“If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection....” God gave you life through the waters of baptism connected with his life-giving Word. Think of the birth of a child. That child didn't decide to be conceived or be born. No, by God's grace that little one was given life! In a similar way, you don't decide to get spiritual life from God. You don't earn spiritual life from God. No, God who is rich in mercy gives you life through his holy, almighty Word. That's how water can do such great things as Martin Luther put it in his *Small Catechism*, because that water is connected to God's all-powerful Word.

The Lord, then, sustains that new life. If you put a new plant in the ground, you have to take care of it. If you don't give it enough water or enough sunlight, it will shrivel and die. If you don't sustain it, the plant will die. When you were baptized, the Holy Spirit planted faith in Jesus in your heart through the power of his Word. God promised to sustain your faith, but he can only do that when you're connected with his Word of life like a hose going from an open faucet to a thirsty plant. The Psalmist describes what that looks like in the life of a believer, ***“His delight is in the Word of the LORD, and on his Word he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.”*** (Psalm 1:2-3)

Without a constant connection to the Word, your faith will die, but connected to God's Word, your faith will thrive, growing strong roots in Christ. The Lord sustains your spiritual life as he helps you recommit your connection to his Word. If you haven't been in worship for a while, with the Lord's help, you can commit to weekly worship. If you've been in worship, but haven't been in Bible Study, with the Lord's help, you can commit to regularly attending Bible study. If you've been doing both of these things, with the Lord's help, you can commit to daily time with Jesus in his Word. Spend time in God's Word and watch the waters of life quench your thirsty faith!

Through baptism, then, the Lord becomes the focus of your life lifting your eyes heavenward. Daily recalling what God did for you in baptism directs your eyes towards heaven, the prize already won by Jesus. So much in this life tries to draw your focus away from that prize, but since you are alive to God in Christ Jesus, your perspective

changes. Your priorities change. Your life changes. The focus is no longer on you, but on Christ, who has given you life. So you daily go back to your baptism to refocus on Jesus.

What a story, isn't it? You just can't put it down. It's all true, and you can't pull your eyes away. Dead to sin! Alive with Christ! Connected to his death and resurrection! All through a few drops of water and God's Word, so we can sing, ***"God's own child I gladly say it, 'I am baptized into Christ!'"*** Amen.