

Romans 6:1-14; Lenten Service 4A; 3/29/17

Baptism

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In order to encourage and strengthen our confidence that the message of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is true and that it can deliver what it promises, Jesus twice connected physical signs to his spoken words. He connected water to his promise of life and, right before he died, he took the simple elements of bread and wine and bound them to the promise of the forgiveness of our sin.

The church gave the name *sacrament* to both of the promises to which Jesus attached physical signs of water, bread, and wine. These sacraments are called Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And, tonight, our focus is on Baptism, the great bath of the church.

Through Baptism, we are made new. We are not simply repaired or refurbished as one would fix up an old house. It is not a mere washing away of the dirt of our lives that leaves our old selves cleaner but still intact. God's Word in Baptism literally kills

the old sinful self in us. As Paul wrote, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Yet, God does not leave us in death but raises us up into a completely new life in Christ. Again, Paul wrote, “As Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

Baptism marks God’s adoption of the Christian believer into the life of faith. This adoption is solely God’s decision about us and for us, and it has nothing to do with our decision concerning God. In Baptism, God adopts us as children and gives to each of us all that is most basic to life. In Baptism, God forgives our sin, literally washing us clean of it, and opens to us a redeemed life as it was meant to be lived. God promises and grants the gift of a life that will not end in death. Baptism is intended to create faith in God within us, a faith that is made new every day. As we daily remember our Baptism, we daily *walk wet* in the waters of our Baptism. Baptism is something to be remembered, renewed and experienced every day.

As Luther talks about Baptism he reminds us it is not water only. It is water used together with God's Word and by God's command. Water without God's Word is only water. But used together with the Word of God, the water of Baptism creates faith and makes us alive in a way different and fuller than we might ever have imagined possible. Trust in this "visible word" of God is **not** a precondition for receiving the benefits of Baptism. God's Word, through the work of the Holy Spirit, creates faith and trust within us. Therefore, we are justified (made right with God) by God's own decision. It is all something **God** does, and it is nothing we do. We have been baptized: that is, we have been justified. God has already done that for us and in us.

We are always baptized into a community, a community of faith that promises to teach and pray for the newly baptized as together we grow in faith, obedience and trust in our gracious God. In Baptism, the faith community also responds to the promises God has made to us. The faith community promises to:

- Bring the newly baptized to the services of God's house.

- Teach the newly baptized the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments.
- Place the Holy Scriptures in the hands of the newly baptized.
- And, provide instruction in the Christian faith for the newly baptized.

Luther rejoiced in the gift of Baptism for many reasons.

Listen to these paraphrases of some of his writings:

- In ordinary water (the same as the maid's cooking water), when Christ's promise is present, there God is present – hidden as God was hidden in the manger and the cross.
- In Baptism God delivers from “sin, death, and the devil” and gives **all** the benefits of God's kingdom. God effects a change of lordship – from “sin, death and the devil” to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- In this beautiful sacrament, we are given a way of life, a daily pattern of returning to the waters of Baptism and there we drown. We die again to the old “turned-in-on-self” being. And, we rise again, forgiven and cleansed, to new life in Christ.
- Baptism is so full of comfort and grace that heaven and earth cannot comprehend it. It promises and brings the entire Christ! The blessings of baptism are boundless. No greater jewel can adorn our body and soul than Baptism, for through it we obtain perfect holiness and salvation.

So, therefore, over this next week, I invite you to daily remember and celebrate this precious and lovely gift. You have been washed in water **and** God's word and you have been made new.