

PENTECOST 3
JEREMIAH 20:7-12
ROMANS 6:1b-11
MATTHEW 10:24-39
JUNE 24, 25, 2017

YEAR A

We often struggle or wrestle with living a Christian life. We live in a world that seeks to lure us away from God and God's word. We might struggle to do the right thing as we live our Christian lives. In the church we talk about sin and how we are sinners. Every time we gather we confess our sins and hear God's word of forgiveness. Do we really feel forgiven? We might also think there is no use in trying to not sin because of the things we tend to say and do. If we read the chapters and verses that lead up to our Romans text for today, we hear Paul say that our sin separates us from God. He talks about the old Adam and how the sin of Adam clings to us. Paul calls this our human condition. Because of our human condition we are separated from God being stuck in our sin. Romans 5 is about being reconciled to God through Christ Jesus. Paul says we are brought back by God's grace active through faith. As we read and look at Romans 6 we hear Paul teach about baptism. He says that through baptism we are made new people of God. Through baptism we have a new relationship with God every day. We are brought under God's grace.

Romans 6:1, 2 What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?

The argument might have been that if sin were multiplied God's grace would be increased even more. Since God forgives more we need to sin more. It is the argument given by those that insisted that the law is necessary to be right with God. In their sarcasm people might have been saying that we should sin more so that we receive more grace. The opening verses of chapter six are Paul's response to that kind of thought. Paul's opponents insisted that the law is everything and that we are bound by the law. Paul argues that we are saved by grace and through faith. He teaches that we that have received grace have died

to sin. If we have died to sin in baptism, we must not continue to live in the sin. Through baptism we can make the transition from sin into grace through the sacrament of baptism. The law tells us where we have missed the mark or where we have gotten it wrong. The law is important for good order in our lives, in our families, in our communities and in our church. The law cannot do what Jesus did on the cross. The law is not grace and cannot free us from our sin.

Many have come to the waters of baptism. We come because the Holy Spirit led us to the water. We begin our funeral services with these words of scripture. We begin by proclaiming our baptism and that we live our lives under this baptismal covenant. We remember that we have been claimed by God and are washed clean. Paul teaches that we live in this covenant throughout our lives. This is not just a momentary event that happens one day. We live under this covenant or this promise all the days of our lives.

Romans 6:3, 4 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Paul teaches that baptism is a journey throughout our lives. We participate in the death of Jesus Christ and in his resurrection. As Christians, we believe that we are one with Jesus Christ in his death and we are joined to him in his resurrection. Baptism does not erase sin but brings us into a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Baptism keeps our lives in check. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are immersed in Christ. When Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan he invited us to become part of him. He identified with us so that we might identify with him. When John questioned Jesus' coming to him Jesus responded, **"Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."**

In baptism, we are invited to be who we are. Who are we? What are we about as God's people? One of the most difficult questions to answer is the one that asks us to describe ourselves. The other day four of us volunteered with Habitat for Humanity. The staff for Habitat led a devotion and prayer before the work began. As part of the devotion one of the leaders ask us to introduce ourselves and then say something interesting about ourselves. I listened and watched as each person struggled to say something about him or herself. Most of the responses told about their experiences with Habitat or other things they have done. So often who we are is translated as what we have done. Who I am is the culmination of my life experiences. Who I am finds its roots in the work I have done or in the things I am part of.

"Who am I" is an important question for each of us to answer. Since God has claimed us we are children of God. We are children of God as we are united with our Lord in death and in life. We are no longer bound by our sin. Paul says that we have died to sin so that we no longer need to live in it. Luther says that we are simultaneously saints and sinners. He says that we remain in our human condition but we are set free from our sins by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we hear words of forgiveness we have the assurance that our sins are forgiven. We know that we are washed clean and set back on our feet.

Romans 6:5, 6 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

Jesus died on the cross taking our sin. Through the baptism of Christ our old self has been crucified with him. The body of sin is destroyed. Paul assures us that we are no longer slaves to our sin but are set free by Jesus Christ. We celebrate our Lord's victory and we look forward to sharing life throughout eternity. Paul might be saying that we need to live like the people we claim to be. We are to live as children of God saved by grace through faith.

When we are told to remember our baptism, it does not mean so much remembering the time and the place. It isn't about who were the sponsors or who poured that water. It is saying, "Remember who you are." It is reminding you that you have died to sin and you live a new life in Jesus Christ. It is a way of saying: Be who you are. "Remember your baptism" also means, "Remember who you belong to." Paul says remember that you are dead to sin and alive in God through Christ Jesus. We are alive in Christ. Let us celebrate that life as we embrace the blessings of God. AMEN