



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

United with Christ

Romans 6:1-11

Fr. William Klock

April 4, 2015 – Easter Vigil

Maundy Thursday puts our attention on the Lord's Supper as Jesus instituted it on that last night before his death. In the Lord's Supper we see Jesus as the Suffering Servant, as the Passover lamb, being led to the slaughter that the wages of sin and death might "pass-over" all those covered by his blood. Maundy Thursday, the Christian "Passover", the Lord's Supper leads us to the cross. On Good Friday we gather at the foot of the cross as the lamb is sacrificed for our sins with the promise that he will make all things new—that he will heal and restore a world and a people broken and in bondage to sin and death. And now at Easter we see the lamb vindicated as he rises from death to life as the conqueror of sin and death and as he leads the way to resurrection. As St. Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15, we have a sure hope in Jesus; he is the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead; and where he has gone he will one day lead us.

It's very fitting then that our remembrance of our Lord's passion begins by putting our attention on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and now, on the other side of the cross, brings us to the sacrament of holy Baptism. In our Epistle, taken from Romans 6, St. Paul writes:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory

of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

When Jesus rose from the grave he led the way into what Paul calls "newness of life". This was what he promised in the upper room, and now, this side of the cross, that newness of life is reality. And even though we await the resurrection on that last great day of the age, even though we haven't yet experienced fully what Jesus experienced that first Easter morning, we can still participate in his life while we wait in hopeful expectation. If we are in Christ, life has been changed for us. In our baptism we share with Jesus, in some mystical way, his death and his resurrection and his new life.

Now, there's a reason that Paul tells us this. Our Epistle begins at verse 3, but if we go back to verses 1 and 2 he asks a question. Chapter 5 of Romans, the previous chapter, is where he tells us about grace. Specifically it's where he expresses the utterly amazing thing about grace: that where sin abounds, grace super-abounds—that God's grace will cover every sin for those who are in Christ Jesus. The danger there is that some people might misunderstand the reality of grace and end up taking advantage of grace, so Paul asks:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

If grace is such a good thing, and since it abounds wherever sin is, should we not then abound in sin and receive an even greater measure of grace? And Paul's answer is:

By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

It doesn't come through in most of our English translations, but what Paul is describing is a change of

state: a transfer from one covenant to another.

Veronica and I were in Montréal not long after the last referendum in the 90s. Tensions were still pretty high. We were fine downtown, but one night we drove east to do some shopping and to eat dinner and we discovered that speaking English was unwise. For a few minutes, while we were in a grocery store checkout, I was afraid the clerk and most of the other customers might lynch us. Being in francophone country meant speaking French, unless you wanted trouble. But imagine how silly it would have been, after we flew home to Vancouver, to go around still speaking French. We'd experienced a change of state. A plane picked us up in Montréal and transferred us to Vancouver. There was no longer any reason to speak French. That's something of what Paul is getting at. In this case, we were once living in a state of sin, but Jesus has transferred us to a state of grace. In other places Paul talks about Adam and Jesus. We were all born "in Adam", Paul says. We were all born into a state of sin and subject to death. But by God's grace, through our baptism, we have been transferred—we've been removed from Adam's family and been made part of Jesus, who knows no sin. As we sing in Isaac Newton's hymn: "'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far"—grace transfers us from Adam's family to Jesus' family and grace keeps us in Jesus' family despite our continued sins, but we're already here. We sinned because we were part of Adam's family and that's how Adam's family behaves, but by grace we've been removed from that sinful family. There's no longer any reason to sin—in fact, to continue in sin, is in a very real way to express a desire to leave Jesus' family and to return to Adam's. As Paul writes,

“How can he who died to sin still live in it?”

The rest of our Epistle affirms this reality, this change of state, just in case we’re inclined to disbelieve that it’s happened. Think back to Thursday. I said that as the Passover was confirmation for Israel that they were people in covenant with God, so the Lord’s Supper is confirmation for us, the new Israel, that we are in covenant with God through Jesus. Baptism is much the same. It corresponds to circumcision in the Old Testament. It was through circumcision that children were brought into covenant with God, and for Christians baptism does the same thing. God offers his promise of redemption and of new life in these waters and we take hold of his promise in faith as we pass through these waters.

Paul says, more specifically, though that through these waters we not only receive God’s promise, we’re not only transferred into the new covenant, but we actually participate with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. Holy Week isn’t merely a commemoration of events through which Jesus walked two thousand years ago. No. Through our baptism we participate with Jesus in these events. In baptism we take hold of Jesus by faith and that means that everything he has done is applied to us.

Paul goes on in verses 5-6:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Again, we lose a bit of what Paul is saying when we translate him into English. When he says we were buried with him, that we’ve been united with him in his death, that we will be resurrected like him, that we were crucified with him what Paul actually does is add a prefix that means “with” to the verbs in Greek. Literally, we and Jesus have been “with-crucified”, we and Jesus have “with-died”, we and Jesus have been “with-buried”, we and Jesus will be “with-resurrected”—we with Jesus, all through our baptism. Never let anyone tell you that baptism is just a symbol or that baptism is primarily something that *you* do to show *your* commitment to God. In baptism God makes his promise and commitment to us and through it he unites us with Jesus—in death and in new life.

That means, brothers and sisters, that when Jesus broke from the tomb on Sunday morning having conquered sin and death, we who have been baptized were with him. Think of the Israelites passing through the waters of the Red Sea to leave their slavery to Egypt behind, never to go back. In the same way, Jesus leads us through the waters of baptism, leaving our slavery to sin and death behind. And in that lies the answer to Paul’s question: Should we keep sinning? No. Imagine how silly it would have been for the Israelites to go back to being slaves in Egypt. It would be just that silly for us to go back to being slaves to sin and death. And so Paul goes on:

For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he

lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:7-11)

Death no longer has dominion over us. Through our baptism we are in Christ Jesus who is alive. Think again of Israel. The Lord led them out of Egypt, drowning Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea, he led Israel across the wilderness, and finally into the Promised Land. Pharaoh no longer had dominion over them. And brothers and sisters, sin and death no longer have dominion over us, so long as we are in Christ Jesus. He has broken our family ties with the sinful first Adam, at the cross he broke the chains of sin and death by which we were bound, and through his resurrection he leads us into new life—a life committed to God, the life we were created to share as God’s servants and stewards and worshipers.

This is the new life. This is what Easter is all about. Friends, think of the empty tomb and be encouraged. When the world, the flesh, and the devil tempt us to go back to our old life of sin, remember that at the cross Jesus broke the chains of sin. We are no longer bound to that slavery. In our baptism we are bound to God, through Jesus, by a covenant of love. When sin tempts you remember our Easter acclamation:

“Christ is risen!”
And so are we!