Remember Your Baptism

Do you remember when you were baptized? If you were baptized at an older age you may, but if you were just a little baby at the time, you probably don’t remember any of the details of your baptism. The fact remains, however, that when we were baptized into Christ, God did some truly great things for us, as Paul emphasizes in our text for this morning. There are many churches, however, which ignore and even oppose the practice of infant baptism on the grounds that baptism is nothing more than an expression of your own faith rather than a precious means of grace through which the Almighty God brings the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation to sinful human beings. To make matters even worse, those who still practice infant baptism seem to attach very little importance to it, as if it is nothing more than a quaint custom through which a child receives a name and is placed on the membership role of a church.

Unfortunately this indifferent attitude toward baptism has also crept into the Lutheran Church. Although the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is one of the six chief parts of our catechism, and although we are taught from childhood that it works the forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, how many of us ever think about our baptism in later life? When we teach our children to pray and tell them about their Savior, do we also remind them of the solemn agreement that God made with them in their baptism? Do we always bear in mind what blessings have been bestowed upon us in our own baptism? Or do we even remember that for many of us, it was through baptism that we were first born again as God’s children, received into his grace and made heirs of eternal life? For most of us, the answer to those questions will most likely be an outright “no.” Baptism rarely enters our minds except when someone is baptized, and even then, its vital importance is quickly forgotten. But as Paul points out in our text, our baptism—yours and mine—is of vast importance for as long as we live. Thus he would say to each of us this morning: REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM! Remember what it has freed you from and remember what it has freed you for.

Paul says: “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.” (vs 3-4) Through baptism we are incorporated into Christ’s death for our sins as well as his victorious resurrection from the dead. In baptism, our Savior unites himself with us in a most wonderful way so that we share in all that Christ has done for us. As soon as the water of baptism is applied to us in the name of our Triune God, our Lord looks upon us as if we had died and rose again, as if we ourselves had borne the punishment for all our transgressions and had obtained the victory over death and hell. For all of this we can thank our Savior, Jesus Christ, because in baptism we died with Christ and rose again with him, or as Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” In other words, baptism is the formal application of our Savior’s redemptive work for the whole human race to individual sinners like you and me. Through baptism all the benefits of his sacrificial death on the cross are applied to each of us personally.

And what are those benefits? Paul tells us: “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.” (vs. 6-7) Our old self, that sinful rebellious nature that we all possess from birth is crucified, literally murdered, when we are baptized as God actually frees us from ourselves and brings a whole new person into being—a person who is now declared righteous in God’s sight and is no longer a slave to sin. When Paul says that God destroyed the body of sin, he’s viewing our body as the expressive instrument of our will, a will that is completely contrary to God’s will so that we are not even interested in trying to do what God wants us to do. Through baptism, that “body of sin” is put out of action so that we are no longer slaves to sin nor controlled by it. Baptism destroys the power of sin and sets us free from its soul-strangling grip because “anyone who has died has been freed from sin”—not freed from sinning as if we will never sin again, but free from the rule or power of sin over us thanks to the forgiveness that baptism brings us.

What a source of comfort this fact can be for all of us, if we will only remember our baptism and what it has freed us from. When our past sins stand before us and point the accusing finger directly at us, or when a voice from within whispers, “Who knows what your fate will be? Perhaps you'll end up in hell after all,” then let’s remember our baptism. Remember that we have been baptized into Jesus Christ. Then and there we put on Christ. His suffering, his death, his resurrection—everything that he has accomplished for us as our Savior is applied to us in baptism. Even though we may break our baptismal covenant and fall into sin time and again, God will never break his part of the agreement. He says to you and to me: “Though the
mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you." (Is 54:10) Whenever we suffer in this life, whenever we feel forsaken or are afflicted in any way, then let’s remember our baptism. Remember how Christ has freed us from sin and made us heirs of everlasting life. After all, what are the sufferings of this present time compared to the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation that God offers us in Christ? There is no comparison, for there is no greater gift than the gift of eternal life and no greater freedom than the freedom from sin and its condemnation which baptism brings us.

Yet may people like to abuse that freedom. Paul quotes such individuals at the beginning of this chapter when he says, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” (6:1) There’s always the temptation to turn our freedom from sin into a freedom to sin—the freedom to do pretty well as we please since we can always count on God’s forgiveness in any event. Some of the early Christians actually felt that they could please God in this way since it would give him more opportunities to forgive them. Such thinking, however, overlooked the whole purpose of baptism. Thus Paul points out that baptism not only sets us free FROM sin, but also frees us FOR a life lived to God, a life in which we offer ourselves as “living sacrifices” to the Lord. Remembering our baptism, then, also means remembering what is has freed us for, namely a life that is now dedicated to doing all to the glory of God.

This is what Paul has in mind when he says: “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.” Our baptism should be a constant reminder that God has called us to be his own, that he has freed us from the slavery of sin, and thereby changed our lives. He has set us free to live as his children under the lordship of our Savior, Jesus Christ, thanks to the Holy Spirit who gives us this new life in Christ. Thus remembering our baptism means more than just appealing to a former experience or to a ceremony that was accomplished some time in the past. Baptism tells us to remember who we are every day of our lives! We are God’s children because of his loving act in Jesus Christ. We are people in whom God’s Spirit lives and moves, people who have renounced the devil and all his works and all his ways, people who are empowered by the Holy Spirit so that we can walk in newness of life.

But think of all the people who forget about their baptism, who ignore God’s invitation to salvation or fail to walk in newness of life! Countless numbers from the Christian church who have been baptized sever their connection with Christ as they grow older. Many seem to feel that simply being baptized and then confirmed at the proper age will automatically grant them a seat in the kingdom of God. However, those who cast aside the heavenly treasures that God grants us in baptism will be lost forever unless they turn again to Christ and embrace him as their Savior. A person may have a thorough knowledge and perfect understanding of the Christian faith, but it won’t do him any good if that intellectual knowledge fails to filter down to his heart and effect a new life within.

Listen again to what Paul says in the last verse of our text: “Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” God doesn’t make us his children in baptism so that we can play around with the fire of sin without getting burnt. He doesn’t destroy the power of sin for us so that we can play around with the fire of sin without getting burnt. He doesn’t destroy the power of sin for us so that we can handle sin on our own. No, he sets us free from sin so that we might remain dead to sin and alive to God. In the words of Paul: “We died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?” That’s a question that all of us need to seriously consider every day of our lives.

We talk a lot about Christian living, but for many that seems to mean attending church on Sunday morning without any corresponding change in conduct throughout the week. As a result, people who call themselves Christians often repeat the same off-color jokes, share in the same prejudices, express the same resentments, and follow the same self-centered lifestyles as their non-Christian friends and acquaintances. Then we wonder why the world seems skeptical of our confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we know what God has done for us in Christ. We know that he has cleansed us of our sin and has called us to be his own. That knowledge, however, calls for action on our part. It calls for a life that is God-oriented and God-directed, a life that is lived with Christ at the center of it. Apart from Christ, it is impossible to please God. But with Christ, it is possible for us to walk in “newness of life” as people who are alive to God and alert to his will for our lives. So REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM. Remember what it has freed you from and what is has freed you for. In so doing, you will be able to hold fast to all the blessings of your baptism and receive the crown of eternal life that our Savior offers to all who remain faithful unto death. Amen.