

Romans 6:1-11

Epiphany 1B + The Baptism of Our Lord + January 10, 2018

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho

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Hide and Seek

The Word of the Lord from Romans 6:4: "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." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, you want to get away. Think of the sandlot baseball game, where the kids vanish as soon as the ball goes through a window. Consider the reason for bail bonds to ensure that those accused of crimes return for trial; or why politicians disappear after scandal to "spend more time with family." It's the natural reaction to run away, to get away from the spotlight after a mishap, sin or embarrassing moment.

When things go bad, we want to get away. Sometimes, it's run and hide. Sometimes, it's even a desire not to be alive anymore just to make the pain stop. It might be guilt over sin. It might be shame brought about by the sins of others. It might be grief at what has been lost, or exhaustion from a burden that's grown heavy. It might not be real, just a perception of worthlessness or futility.

Get away from past sins. Get away from people. Get away from guilt. Get away from shame. Get away from pain. These are natural reactions. We add one more: get away from God.

When Adam and Eve sinned, their first reaction was to run away and hide, not confess. Their shame drove them into seclusion. When the Lord commanded Jonah to preach His Word to the Ninevites, the prophet hopped on a ship in the opposite direction. Sins are described as the "works of darkness" (cf. Ephesians 5:11), hoped by sinners to be *hidden* away from the light that God casts. I have heard hell described as a place of no rest, because unbelievers are constantly trying to get further and further away from the Lord – if nothing else, it's an interesting portrayal.

The guilt and shame of sin drives people away from God, and this is where the blindness of sin shows its alliance with death: it tells the sinner to keep running away. If you're sick or injured, the sensible thing to do is to get *to* a doctor. If you're sinful, it only makes sense to get to the One who takes away sin. But without God's intervention, sinners want to just keep running.

So how should the Lord respond? Sinners break His Law and then flee from Him, sensing only His wrath and denying His mercy. They spread their opinions that God is cruel and inflict their cruelty on others – what's the Lord to do? Would you really blame Him if He turned His back on this fallen creation and said, "Enough is enough?" Wouldn't it make sense if He showed up just long enough to reduce this creation to a pile of dust and ashes?

But that isn't what the Lord has done at all. Instead, He pursues to save.

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Adam and Eve couldn't hide from God after they fell into sin; and as soon as the Lord found them, He declared that He wasn't going to forsake sinners. Instead, He promised to pursue, and not from far off: He promised that Christ would become flesh in order to save His

people. That is what we celebrated at Christmas: conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, the Son of God – begotten from eternity – became flesh, just like you and me. And then He came to be baptized.

In our gospel lesson, there John is preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Sinners are coming from all over the place to hear the Word he preaches, and to be baptized.

There comes Jesus, the Son of God, sinless and holy. And what does He do? His glory concealed so as not to make sinners run away, He asks to be baptized along with them. But why? He has no sin in need of forgiveness, no guilt to be washed away.

Mark this, and mark it well: on the day of His baptism, the Lord Jesus Christ is baptized to be numbered with sinners, not to stand apart from them. As His baptism declares the formal beginning of His ministry, He demonstrates that He has come to save people from sin. Their sins were washed off of them in their baptism, they are washed onto Him. As the righteous, holy Son of God is numbered with sinners that day, He takes their sin upon Himself. It is the formal, public start to His journey to the cross, as He bears their sins and infirmities upon Himself – so that He might die for them to set His people free.

That's the big deal about the Baptism of our Lord: He is numbered with sinners there because He is taking their place. Clearly, He has approval: the Father speaks of His beloved Son from heaven, even as the Spirit descends in the form of a dove. This is God's plan of salvation, the will of the entire Trinity. Later at the cross, Jesus is *the* sinner who is singled out by God to suffer judgment for all the sins of the world. There, the judgment for all sin is rendered. The price has been paid for sin.

All sin.

That's astonishing. What good news! Rather than turn His back when sinners run away, the Lord pursues. By way of the cross, He outruns them, takes their place and is forsaken by God in their stead. That's the good news of the Gospel lesson, but we also have good news from our epistle: the pursuit continues, so that you can be sure that this forgiveness is for you.

The Lord is not content to leave you just with the good news that He died and rose for you in the past. He brings this into the present. He brings it into your presence. He takes that forgiveness, His death and His resurrection, and He gives it all to you in these words: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The Lord has come to you. He has pursued you, sought you out, "caught" you in Holy Baptism. It isn't just a quaint rite of passage: look what happens in Holy Baptism, according to our epistle: "Do you not know that all of us who were baptized in 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."

In Holy Baptism, you have been united with Jesus. Your sins have been washed away – they were washed onto Him at His Baptism, and He took them to the cross.

Therefore, in Holy Baptism you have been united with Jesus in His death. You are not going to die for your sin, only to be separated from God forever. You're not going to die for your sin – because He's already died for your sin. He made your death to be His on the cross, and now in Baptism He makes His death to be yours. Because you're united with Him and His death, you've already died to sin. God no longer holds your sins against you.

There's more: in Holy Baptism, you are united with Jesus who is risen from the grave. There's no way that the grave is your end: because He has joined you to Himself, He will also raise you to life. Your baptism means that eternal life is already yours, that you will be raised from the dead – because you have been joined to Christ, and Christ is raised from the dead.

This is how the cross and Holy Baptism fit together. At the cross, by His death, Jesus won forgiveness and salvation for *all*. At the font, in Holy Baptism, Jesus gives that forgiveness and salvation to *you*– by name! The Lord has not forsaken His people. Even as they ran away from Him, He became flesh to die for their sins. He pursued them.

And because you were born in sin on the run from God, He has pursued you. And at your baptism, He said, "I've got you! No death and hell for you anymore, but only life and salvation in My name."

The great temptation mentioned by our text is to abuse this grace. As long as sin still clings, your Old Adam will whisper perfectly logical arguments like this: "If Jesus has died for all of your sins, then you might as well go ahead and keep on sinning. Do what you want. Your ticket to heaven is punched, so your sins don't matter anymore." This is an attractive argument, because your old sinful flesh so wants to sin. But that is why our text begins, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound? By no means!" You've died to sin. You've been joined with the holy Son of God in His death and resurrection. To return to willful, intentional sin now would be to say, "Lord, You may have caught up with me in my baptism, but I want to run away again. I prefer sin – and the eternal death that it brings – to the life and salvation You've given me freely." That is the way to condemnation. That is the way to eternal separation and terrible flight from God's goodness and presence.

Instead, you rejoice in this: you don't have to run away anymore. You'll still want to. You'll want to run toward a seductive sin, or run away from the Lord in guilt or shame, or from the pain of doing the right thing. But you know better. Those sins promise death, not life. And while you may feel guilt or shame – and thus fear God's wrath, in Christ there's no wrath left for you.

So against the temptations of sin, death and devil, you proclaim the joyous news: "I am baptized into Christ."

When you do sin, you confess that sin, rejoicing that the Lord still pursues you with grace in His Absolution and His Supper. He renews your baptism. He says, "I've still got you!"

You've been joined to Jesus in Holy Baptism – to His death and to His resurrection, and He continues to keep you in His grace. In Him, God pours upon you grace and salvation, mercy and life.

In Him, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen