

Romans 6:1-11

The Baptism of Our Lord (Midweek) + January 16, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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The bride and groom turn from the altar hand-in-hand, united as one, ready to face life together. By their pledges they have indicated that they will be working together and sharing in all the outcomes that life may bring: joys or sorrows, proud moments or disappointments. As the timeout ends, the basketball team puts their hands together and gives a shout. They are in it together as one, and whatever the outcome, whether victory or defeat, they are united.

These examples point us to a key sentence from our Epistle reading, Romans 6:5, *"If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."* Yes, we are united with Christ. We're in it together. Because we are one, we have and will experience the same outcomes. So today we are going to review and celebrate some important unitings.

We turn first to our Gospel account of Jesus' baptism. From the beginning of His incarnation, His conception in the virgin's womb by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was in the role of Savior and Redeemer of the world. His work had been ordained before the creation of the world. His sinless life had been an indispensable part of His winning victory for us. But now the game was ready to begin in earnest and in public. Two significant unities are evident.

John the Baptist was rightly reluctant to baptize Jesus. He realized that the sinless Jesus needed no repentance or washing for cleansing. But there was more going on here. Jesus the heavenly Substitute was identifying with, uniting with, those He came to save. When a new player comes into the game to fill in for another, they often touch hands as they exchange roles, playing and watching. Jesus touched hands with all humanity in His baptism. In Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism, He tells John, *"Let it be so now, it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."* The words, "it is proper," and "let it be," are a bit understated. What Jesus requested was necessary. It is imperative. It must be so. If humanity was to have the perfect righteousness demanded by God's law, a divine Substitute must come into the game. If sin, death, and the devil were to be defeated, a Stronger One must come in to play.

So Jesus insists: I will be baptized. Why? Because I have come for sinners, I stand with sinners, and I am to be the chief of sinners, shouldering the burden of all. Righteousness can be tied to a manner of living, a way of being. But here it especially is tied to following what God has ordered or set forth. For Jesus that means becoming, in effect, the embodiment of humanity and then, even while observing God's will, heading toward the place where that sin-plagued humanity leads. Jesus' baptism is the start of that path which ends three years later on the cross. When Jesus identified with sinners, He put himself in a place, in a position, to need what John was offering: a baptism of repentance; not that Jesus needed it in His own right, but as the Lamb who takes on Himself the sin of the world. So John should "let it be" even as Jesus chooses to side with sinners, to stand with them figuratively, to stand with them even literally in the Jordan waters. Jesus unites Himself with us.

There was another unity displayed there in the Jordan. The Divine three-person team was united, in total agreement on how the battle would be fought and won. The Spirit came down and rested upon Jesus, empowering Him for His saving work. The Father voiced His approval with the words from heaven, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with Him am well pleased."* The Father, who had the right to designate one to carry out His business, proclaims Jesus the Christ, the Anointed One, the One who would bring about the uniting of God and man who were separated by sin.

Now we turn to our text and discover the uniting that took place in our baptism. One thing is common between Jesus' baptism and ours. God is acting. He brings about the unity. In Jesus' baptism,

He was the subject. He was the One whose circumstance was changed. He laid aside the full use of His divine glory and took on a difficult, painful, deadly role, so that we might be saved. He was humbled so that we might be exalted. In our baptism, God is acting and we are the subject. Our circumstance drastically changes for the better because we are united with Christ and His death and life.

Blood Banks, in order to promote their blood drives, use the phrase, "giving the gift of life." Life-saving blood certainly is a precious gift when it is needed. We don't hear much about giving the gift of death. Perhaps that's due to our understanding that death is not much of a gift. At least, it's not a gift we'd typically want, and with good reason: death is our enemy. But today, St. Paul tells us that in Holy Baptism, Christ bestows on us the gifts of His death and resurrection.

Gifts given within families are generally more special, significant, and spendy, than those given to casual friends. We receive God's best gifts because we have been made part of His family, united with Christ, in baptism. Are we really united? After all, the verse said, "*If we have been united with him like this in His death.*" This is one of those instances where Paul is not raising doubt, but leading us to a logical conclusion. The word *if* could be understood as *since*. Since we are united in His death, we are also united in His resurrection. Christ's death and resurrection are inseparable. Because we are united, the outcomes, results, and benefits of both, are, and will be, ours.

There's no doubt about it. Verse 3 asserts, "*Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*" It's not *for* His death, or *in remembrance of* His death but *into* His death. There is a joining, a uniting, involved.

In His sacrificial death, Christ took the guilt of mankind's sin upon Himself, becoming accursed in their place. He saved mankind from the imminent eternal punishment that their sin and imperfection deserve. Now, through baptism, we receive as a gift the results of Christ's death in our place. Our old sinful nature inherited from Adam is drowned, crucified with Him. Sin's control over us is broken. Since we have died with Him through baptism, we have been set free from sin. Our catechism's definition of the gospel states that we have been *set free from the guilt, punishment, and power of sin and saved eternally by Christ's keeping of the law and His suffering and death for us*. We still sin, but since we are united with Christ, we don't have to fear losing out in the end.

In His resurrection, Christ totally defeated humanity's archenemies. Sin is no longer master over humanity, as the Second Adam has lived and died without sin. Death has been defeated, and the grave stands wide open. For believers, it's now the gateway to the next stage of life with God. Satan and his dominance are ended. His captives are freed. The great weapon of death in which he trusted is taken away from him. Christ's resurrection promises to humanity life everlasting with him. His reign is endless, since He will never die again. He is able to make and fulfill all promises to mankind, as no defeated enemy can prevent Him from doing so. He lives eternally, having destroyed death and the grave, so that those united with Him may live eternally with Him.

Now, through baptism, we receive as a gift the results of Christ's resurrection. We are made "*alive to God in Christ Jesus,*" redeemed from total depravity and sin. A new, sinless nature has been created in us, so we can live free and eternally in newness of life. Because we are united with Christ in Baptism, we share the same characteristics as Christ and follow Him as His disciples, empowered by His Holy Spirit, who dwells within us. We are made heirs of the Father, children with whom He is well pleased. As redeemed children we will be perfectly renewed at the Last Day and raised incorruptible to live with Christ forever.

But we don't have to wait till then to enjoy the gifts. Luther's Catechism, Baptism, part IV, indicates that the gifts are to be lived out right now, although imperfectly. Our baptismal life in Christ should be evident as we daily repent of our sins and die to all sins and evil desires and arise to live before God and our fellow man in the righteousness and purity that comes from being united with Christ. Paul

obliterates the foolish and dangerous attitude that because we are baptized we can compromise with and engage in the sins with which the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature tempt us. He writes, "*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*" Paul instructs you to *count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*. Although we can't carry that out perfectly, those united to Christ should consider themselves unable to sin, but always alive and eager to do God's will.

Christ united Himself with you, and you are united with Him in Holy Baptism. That means you're going to get some gifts—gifts from your Lord and Redeemer to you. Those gifts include those of His death and resurrection. Baptism is truly a matter of death and life, not just sustaining life, but creating spiritual life where none existed. But without Christ's death, Baptism would have no power, for the forgiveness that it bestows is dependent on His sacrifice. Likewise, without Christ's resurrection, Baptism could never give everlasting life to you, because the power of sin, death, and Satan would have proved stronger than even God incarnate.

But thanks be to God, the gifts of Christ's death and resurrection are real, certain, and everlasting. Without any merit or worthiness in you, Christ our Lord has suffered death on your behalf. Your Redeemer, Jesus, has risen gloriously from the grave, taking all the power away from sin, death, and Satan. Victorious over all of your enemies, Christ bestows His gifts on you through this Sacrament of Holy Baptism. For you, the baptized, have been united with your Savior in both His death and His resurrection, so that you may share in life everlasting. That is your inheritance, the ultimate gift of Baptism, for it has made you the eternal Father's children with whom He is well pleased. Amen.