

January 7, 2024 (Epiphany 1 B – Baptism of Jesus)

Romans 6:1-11

“Is your Baptism - Valuable?”

The question I want you to wrestle with here today is this: *Is your Baptism – valuable?* I chose that word “valuable” carefully – because if something is valuable to us – then we treasure it / we think of it often / we protect it / we make us of it – and we’re so thankful to have it.

Well . . . your baptism didn’t *cost* you anything. It’s incredibly SIMPLE – add a splash of water and say, “*I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*” Nothing dramatic or exciting or outwardly supernatural has ever happened at any baptism I’ve ever witnessed. If you’re Lutheran like me, then you don’t even remember it – because you were a baby! Many of our Evangelical friends DO remember it – because they practice what is called “believers baptism”. But – in that theology baptism is merely a symbol of *my* commitment to God. Therefore (again, according to that theology) baptism isn’t really *valuable* at all because nothing supernatural is even going on. And, seriously, how valuable is a “symbol of my commitment” anyways? Getting out of bed on Sunday morning to go to church is a symbol of my commitment to God as well – but it doesn’t really MEAN all that much, especially when you consider that every time I *sin* – that’s another symbol of my LACK of commitment to Christ. Symbols aren’t really that valuable anyways – they’re just symbols. So . . . for *far too many* Christians – even among us conservative Lutherans who know the miraculous power God connected to Baptism . . . it just really isn’t all that *valuable* to us. Because, we hardly even ever think about it at all!

So what do we so often think about concerning matters of faith and eternal salvation? Because of SIN we go back to our default position, and we think about ourselves. *Do I really believe? I have my doubts about some things in God’s Word. Am I really saved? Am I truly repentant – when I keep falling into the same sins over and over and over again, and I can’t ever seem to root those sins out of my life?* Then comes the uncertainty / the doubts multiply / the fears grow / the guilt and shame abound at how poorly I’ve been performing when I – this big fat hypocrite – have the audacity to call myself a Christian!

What would a good pastor say to me? What would a good church do for me? They would NOT dump more guilt on me by telling

me all the righteous things God demands from me, and all the righteous things I’m *supposed* to be doing as a Christian. They would NOT offer me false hope by telling me that at least I’m not as bad as some people. They would NOT lie to me and tell me my sin really isn’t sin anymore and that I should just forget about it.

GOOD pastors and FAITHFUL churches will direct our eyes away from ourselves and **point you to Christ**. They will bring you back to the objective and rock-solid facts. The text before us is absolutely STUFFED with **facts** – facts that bring us comfort, peace, power, certainty – and facts that remind us how *valuable and powerful that simple gift of Baptism* truly is: **Romans 6:1–11** (NIV)

1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? [Paul tackles this false conclusion / this deadly and diabolical conclusion that some people jump to when they hear about God’s full and free grace in Christ. It is NOT a licence to sin! We have been set FREE from the dungeon of sin / death / hell – crawling back into that pit and living there is a rejection of all that Christ has won for us and wants us to have. Paul goes on . . .] **2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin** [objective FACT]; **how can we live in it any longer?** **3 Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus** [objective FACT] **were baptized into his death?** [objective FACT] **4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death** [objective FACT] **in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.** [The English word *may* is wishy washy here – it’s a result clause that says what Jesus did WILL result in new lives for us.]

5 For if [that should be “since” – because what follows is a FACT] **we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.** [future FACT] **6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him** [objective FACT] **so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.** [again the “might” sounds fuzzy in English – it’s another result clause: the result of these FACTS is that we ARE no longer slaves to sin] **8 Now if** [since] **we died with Christ,** [objective FACT] **we believe** [we TRUST] **that we will also live with him.** [future FACT] **9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all;**

but the life he lives, he lives to God. [objective FACT] **11 In the same way, count [consider] yourselves [because of all these FACTs] dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

You simply can NOT, even begin, to EVER *overestimate* HOW powerful and how VALUABLE that splash of water and those simple words are for you. You were baptized into Christ and you are connected to Him, and YOU have that status as His child, and YOU **are** set free from sin and guilt, and YOU **are** forgiven of all your sins, and you **will** live beyond the grave in heaven, and you **will** rise victorious, and you **will** stand with your Lord as one of His saints when He comes again in glory.

Nothing is more valuable than the FACTS of what Christ has done, and what Christ has given us in the gift of **baptism** / the gift of **faith** – the miracle worked by the Holy Spirit and given to you and me by Grace alone. “*So – my salvation has NOTHING to do with me or my efforts?*” Exactly – it’s all about Him! And that brings the peace that surpasses all understanding, and the JOY that can never be taken from you.

Recently a friend and fellow pastor was telling me about a woman in his church who was dying. He said she was one of those people where you’re really not all that certain that she even had a sinful nature. I mean, we know we’re ALL sinners – but she was a model in the home / always at church / at every Bible class / served in all sorts of ways / seemed to be constantly letting her light shine. There she was on the bed asking her pastor, “*Are my sins really forgiven pastor?*” WHAT?! She had heard about her forgiveness a zillion times! So . . . he told her again. She came back with, “*but are they ALL forgiven?*” He took her back to the FACTS – and her peace returned and she’s in glory now.

Why did I bring up this lady? Because we ALL **need** to be reminded CONSTANTLY! Our eyes will naturally and easily drift back to ourselves – and dark and ugly thoughts and feelings return. **USE YOUR BAPTISM!** How? The same way we did in that beautifully Lutheran hymn we just sang (God’s Own Child I Gladly Say It). The FACTS / our **baptisms** – drive ALL the enemies away!

- “*I feel like such a slave to my sins and my weaknesses. I can’t overcome them!*” NO – you are baptized into Christ! You ARE dead to sin and alive in Him! You ARE wearing the robe of His righteousness and you stand in Grace.

- “*I feel like my life has no purpose / no joy / no meaning – the days, weeks, months, years all just fly by and there seems to be no point to it.*” NO – you are baptized into Christ! You are connected to Him / you’re His child – and put right where He wants you to be and given everything you need to be His instrument. It ALL matters / every moment / every day – you bring glory to Christ in a million different ways. Right now it’s hard – but look at the future He’s won for you and already given you. Be patient / be strong / keep going – you have His power in and behind you.
- “*But I just can’t handle the pain / the grief / the guilt / the fears and the stress and everything is going from bad to worse!*” NO – you are baptized into Christ! He went through hell itself and came out victorious. He will bring you through anything and bring you out of it – victorious. You are connected to Him and He is connected to you – His baptized child.

Have you noticed how God “hides” His most powerful and priceless gifts – right out there in the open / in the simplest of means? This miraculous **Book** has all the answers we will ever need, and the power of God’s Holy Spirit behind every word. This Book is the “Jesus” we get to hold in our hands – the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. People think the **Lord’s Supper** is just an old custom and another symbol that reminds us of what Jesus did. No - here Christ the King touches us individually and personally with the very price of our eternal salvation – His Body / His Blood – given and shed for YOU. He touches your lips as He reminds you how valuable you are to Him / how all your sins are forgiven / He is a part of you and you are a part of Him.

The free gift of **Baptism** means nothing to the unbelieving world we live in. But – the angels rejoice when another lost sinner is found and given the Gift of faith / wrapped up in the righteousness of Christ. My goal and my hope in this sermon is that you can appreciate – at least a little bit, but hopefully a LOT more – **how valuable and powerful Baptism truly is**. Treasure it. Thank God for it. Make use of it – every single day. If it can help you as it helps me – remember this: every time you shower and as the water flows over you to clean your body . . . remember your BAPTISM and say, “*I am baptized into Christ! My soul is clean too – for I am His and He is mine, now and forever.*” Amen.