

Two weeks ago, we talked about how Baptism unites us to Christ's sufferings, but it also unites us to Christ's forgiveness, salvation, and peace. A week ago, we talked about how we have died with Christ in Baptism, and we have been raised again. Our final sermon will be a sermon on the Christian life. Specifically, that we're baptized into Christ's life.

Baptism proclaims to us that we're dead to sin and alive in Christ. The baptized are called to follow Paul's words in this passage. He wrote, **"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."** We are to seek the things that are above. But often, we look at our own lives, and we ask, 1. (oops!) "If I have been raised with Christ, why don't I live like Him?"

If we take a long look in the mirror, it sometimes seems our lives are no different than our neighbors'. If we don't think about it too much, we can shrug it off saying, "Eh, I'm mostly okay. I go to church often enough; I pray often enough. Everything is business as usual." But anything beyond a surface level examination is enough to make us uneasy. We find that we struggle with Paul's command to seek the things that are above. Wouldn't we rather watch TV than study God's Word? It's easier to sleep in or stay in than to attend church services. Even if we do show up to a church service, we find our minds wandering to what's for lunch, our chore list waiting for us at home, or our latest vacation plans. Is this what being baptized into Christ's life looks like?

Paul went on, he said, **"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you..."** Then he listed these earthly things, **"...sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry... anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk."** How many of these sins describe us in one form or another? We often find 2. (ugh!) the more we try to put sin to death, the more sin we find.

As Christians, we're called to live Christ's life. We're called to put to death what's earthly in us, but it often seems like this life of holiness is a whack-a-mole game. If we focus on putting one vice to death, five more seemingly pop up while we're distracted. It can be maddening! The more we look inside ourselves, the more sin we find. We look inside ourselves and we don't find Christ's life, but we find death. As we realize that sin is not simply our deeds, but also our thoughts and desires, it further incriminates us. It can make us feel like false Christians. Given enough self-examination, we may even ask, *"If I have been raised with Christ? Maybe this is a sign that I really haven't been raised with Him after all."*

If we judged our Christianity simply on how well we exhibit Christ's life, any honest examination would leave us in poor shape. We know that our old sinful self is still alive and well in us. We haven't followed Paul's exhortation to put the old self to death. So what about living a Christian life? If Christianity is only about

following the motto of “What Would Jesus Do?” then we either are driven to despair, knowing there’s no way that we’ll live up to His standards. Or we grade on a curve, and pride ourselves in the delusion that we’re at the head of the class, ignoring that God’s standard is perfection.

Again, today’s sermon title is “Baptized into Christ’s life.” But we might wonder if our baptism “didn’t work” because it doesn’t always seem like we’re living like Jesus. At times, it almost seems like we’re going the opposite way; we see the old sinful self more clearly. It seems that as time goes on, we set our minds on earthly things more and more and set our minds on heavenly things less and less. What’s a Christian to do? Wait a second, it looks like I skipped over some words of Paul. He wrote, **“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”** The Bible tells us that we have died. This is true whether we feel like a saint or a sinner on any given day. Where have we died? In Baptism! 3. (aha!) In Baptism, we have died & been united to Christ.

Have you been trying to love your neighbor as yourself, but your patience is wearing thin? You are baptized into Christ. Are you resisting temptation to no avail? You are baptized into Christ. Do you feel like you’re more sinner than saint? You are baptized into Christ. Your sinful self has been declared dead, and you have been raised again to live with Christ. Your life has been hidden with Christ. All those sins you commit have been hidden on the cross. Not only hidden, but forgiven. When the Father looks at you, He sees Jesus. He sees the one of whom He said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” And that becomes what our Father says to us. He says to you, “You are my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.” “You are my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased.”

This all happens by faith. A baptized baby acts, breathes, and looks just like an unbaptized baby. When you examine yourself, it’s easier to see the sins you’ve committed than the good deeds you’ve accomplished. When you look in the mirror, you don’t have a cross on your forehead, and Jesus isn’t standing behind you with a thumbs up. But faith sees beyond outward appearances. By faith we believe that God has declared us dead to sin and alive in Christ, even when we still struggle with temptation. By faith we believe that baptism is more than mere water. By faith we believe that we have been forgiven, and our life is hidden in Christ. And it’s from this foundation we’re able to see that we truly are “baptized into Christ’s life.” And guess what, that faith is given in baptism!

So, 4. (whee!) In light of who God sees in us, we’re free to live for Christ. The Father has declared that He is pleased with us. United to Christ in baptism, the Father loves us! We are forgiven completely of all of our sins. So with the assurance of God’s love for us, we’ve got nothing to prove. We no longer need to

put on a show. There's no point in showing off our holiness to impress others or God. It's not our holiness to begin with, it's Christ's!

Baptized into Christ's life— that's how we're able to live for Christ. God's Word continually works in our heart to set our minds on heavenly things instead of earthly things. Through God's Word working in our heart, we're able to put to death "...what is earthly in [us]: **sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry... anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk...**" Our old self has been put off in baptism, and a new self daily emerges. Or, as the Small Catechism says, "*What does such baptizing with water indicate?* It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." What this means is that our Christian life is not a mountain climbing expedition, where day by day we become holier and holier as we go up, up, up. I think popular Christianity can give us this false impression, and when we don't see a consistent and obvious improvement, we can become discouraged.

Rather, the Christian life is like freediving— it has its ups and downs. Simply put, freediving is any form of swimming underwater without snorkels or scuba gear. If you've ever swam underwater to touch the bottom of the deep end or tried to hold your breath underwater, you've gone freediving. What's the point I'm trying to make? It doesn't matter how good a freediver is, they still need to come up to the surface for air. The baptismal reality of repentance and forgiveness is the very air that we breathe as Christians, and we never outgrow our need. We need to keep on coming back to these surface level truths that we first learned as "baby Christians." Does that mean that we should adopt a lazy-boy Christianity where we stick to the basics and never attempt, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to lead holy lives, and to dive deeper into Biblical truths? Absolutely not!

But what I'm trying to say is that the freediver is only as good as the air he or she breathes. Likewise, Christian growth comes only when the Holy Spirit fills us up to the brim with this life-giving breath of His Word. A freediver will go down into the water, and back up again; down into the water, and back up again, and that's how they grow. Likewise, we continually drown out our old sinful self through confessing our sins and turning away from them, and God continually raises us up to serve Him and serve our neighbor. **BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST'S LIFE, WE SPIRITUALLY DIE AND RISE AGAIN AND AGAIN.**

So, 5. (yeah!) dying to sin and rising again is what the Christian life looks like. We look in the mirror and examine our lives, and we find the filth of our old self remaining, but the Father has proclaimed to us that all that is dead through baptism. We have been declared alive in Christ. With that truth as the firm foundation, we see ourselves for who we truly are, that is "...**being renewed in**

knowledge after the image of [our] creator.” So by the power of the Holy Spirit, we put to death what is earthly in us, and daily we are made alive through the forgiveness of sins. Yes, there will be good days and bad days, and it isn't easy. But the battle has already been won. We have been claimed by Christ in baptism. We've got nothing to prove, and every day is a “bonus round” to love God and to serve our neighbor. Amen.