**Romans 6:1-11 (ESV)**

**“**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? **3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **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. **5** For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For one who has died has been set free from sin. **8** Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **9** We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. **10** For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

**“Out Of The Depths”**

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Where the Christmas season is more of a hidden mystery in a manger, Epiphany uncovers the mystery born of the Virgin Mary. The Epiphany of our Lord is God leading the way in missions. This started on January 6th with the wise men following the star that shined light unto the Gentiles. Of course, the manifestation of a cosmic event in the heavens hands itself over to what happens here on earth. The first Sunday after the Epiphany now looks upon Jesus in His fullness at baptism. Out of this water, the Triune God Father, Son and Holy Spirit publicly made known the love sent to save a sinful world.

 The risen Savior after His suffering and death would use the same waters of baptism to send salvation to the ends of the earth. This emphasis on “revealing” makes Epiphany a useful time to uncover some of the organizations and services helpful to the church. However today, we begin not upon what we can create out of love, but what God creates out of love for us. Jesus is already at work with the Gospel. How do we know? The answer is you. You were baptized into the saving Name of God. It is where we have renounced the devil with all his works and ways. It is where we also have confessed faith in the Triune God who saves sinners by water and His Word. Out of the depths of baptism comes our promised life in Jesus Christ.

The Christians in Rome had plenty of options available to them. Roman way of life monopolized on economic growth and was effective at trade. Unfortunately, managing a fallen creation also brought corruption. Sin in every shape and color became a commodity. To sell to the heart’s desire inflamed the sinful nature all the more. It was a danger even tempting to the baptized. Salvation in Jesus could never be a self-serving product. St. Paul declared, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Access to life in Jesus was first to die with Him. It meant leaving one world made up of sin, death, and the Devil and entering into another world of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Baptism was a watery grave, but it also gave life by faith in Jesus rather than living for self.

Since we live in a society that knows how to sell pretty much everything. Beyond exploiting women for looks, workers for wages, addictions for business, sadly it also happens with God’s love. As one commentator states, “But it is cool, Satanic logic…that we should exploit God, make His grace serve our selfish will, use His gifts to support us in our rebellion against God” (Bul’s Notes). The present creation is confusing and the sinful nature uses it to make every excuse. This is why God gives us another creation unconfused by baptism. St. Paul said, “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.” God monopolizes on water and His Word to create separation not with Him, but with all that is evil. The confusion unravels to walk before Jesus who takes us out of death into His life as Savior.

 No one else in all of Rome could boast like the Christians. Their new connection was in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Instead of making the most of life until you die. St. Paul proclaimed, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” If one thing was precious to Romans, it was their freedom. In contrast, slaves had to work for freedom. Yet, as free as they were, none could escape slavery to the old Adam. The only way not to be a slave to sin was for the New Adam, Jesus Christ, to bestow His freedom as Savior. It meant receiving a kind of death that was far from popular. Baptism connected the old self to a death by crucifixion. Such a death was only for the worst. Except, this freedom coming by water was to Him who literally paid for all sin on His cross.

 Just as Christ grew closer to His suffering and death after baptism, so we grow closer to the crucified Savior after baptism. It is a connection releasing us from captivity to the sinful nature. The boast we have now is to hear Jesus speak His forgiveness as our only true freedom for life. Luther states,

“The old man therefore follows unchecked the inclinations of his nature if he is not restrained and suppressed by the power of Baptism. On the other hand, when we become Christians, the old man daily decreases until he is finally destroyed. This is what it means to plunge into Baptism and daily come forth again” (Large Catechism 445:71).

This decrease of the old Adam means to kill him daily with the promise made by the New Adam. The sinful nature wants to hold us captive knowing we cannot set ourselves free. Christ only wants to speak us free by His words held captive to the cross. He has paid the price by being slave to His own suffering and death. St. Paul proclaims, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). This freedom has no need to serve sin, but Him who wills to be our Savior.

 Where God creates and connects us to Christ by baptism, there is a commitment without end. Those in Rome were to face the fact that no glory of sinful man stands the test of time. Only the eternal glory of God’s Son shines with an enduring light. St. Paul said, “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” There was no going back. God already made the sacrifice. The sinful world had no more excuses. Jesus dealt with death so all would deal with Him as Savior.

Some do not know the promising glory God has put for them in baptism. Others think lightly of it, forgetting baptism brought Christ upon by God’s Word. An early church father proclaims, “There will be no second baptism, no second death of Christ. Therefore we must be careful to stay alive” (Ancient Christian Commentary 161). This is what makes the Lord’s Supper so precious to the baptized saints of God. The “once for all” sacrifice is the life Jesus makes known by His presence under bread and wine. His commitment is without end, because no time, place, or person has ever prevailed with a glory beyond death. Out of the depths of baptism, we trade one glory for another. It is an Epiphany both now and forever to call Jesus “Lord and Savior.” Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.