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

**1** 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.

**“Power of Baptism”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Since the season of Epiphany is to reveal that Jesus born of Mary is the Son of God in flesh and blood. There are plenty of miracles accounting to the power at work in the One from Galilee. Yet, the greatest of all his miracles was not walking on water, feeding five thousand, casting out demons, or raising the dead. Celebrating the Baptism of Our Lord marks more than His life as the promised Savior sent by the Father. It is the miracle of life at work in a world of sin, death, and the Devil. Baptism holds this power for the risen Jesus sent out His Church saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mathew 28:18).

Of course, if we cannot even appreciate life as it is at the present. How will any treasure the promise of life God gives in baptism? Sadly, this month of January marks the fortieth anniversary for abortion in our country. To think such behavior has no affect is a lie to alleviate the pain. Abortion has made us comfortable with death and changed our view of life. The president of Lutherans for Life, Diane Schroeder notes, “For all of our supposed superiority, and sophisticated technology, our country has returned to being a pagan culture of subjective value where killing is tolerated to eliminate problems.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Just as the church in Rome was to cherish life and not death, the catalyst for change still rests on Christ. Jesus makes the miracle of baptism His power at work in a sinful world.

The apostle Paul understood the serious distinction made in baptism. He said, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Where the natural order of things is life then death, the miracle from God is first to die then live. St. Paul notes what happens in baptism using words like “buried,” “dead to sin,” and “old self.” He describes how God works to drown the sinner. If funerals take place at the end of life, Christians go out of the way to recognize the funeral that begins life by water. This act of God to kill man is why Jesus stepped into the waters of His own baptism. None other could open heaven by such water, but only the sinless Son of God. His judgment on the cross took the place of sinful humanity. It is by water that any person first finds not life, but death with Jesus.

Baptism is the power to die with water as our judgment. God has always used water to wipe away the filth He finds. If any doubts this judgment against humanity, we only need to go back to the days of Noah. It holds a picture of original sin for, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). Baptism places judgment on the sinful nature, the old Adam, my old self. Yet, even in this death before life, we were not alone. St. Paul proclaimed, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into to death…” This flood of water that drowns generations of sinners just happens to place all judgment upon Jesus. As the Lord declared by Isaiah, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” Jesus’ death is our death by water. The baptismal font proves none lives unless we first die.

Of course, the momentary act of God’s salvation by water would never replace His Word as life for Christians. Baptism is not some stagnant pool, a ritual of man, but flows with the living power of Jesus. St. Paul saw how Roman society easily took advantage of anything for self-service, especially with something as free as baptism. This is why He said, “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?” God kills only to create. This is what the good news of Jesus brings forth out of baptism. St. Paul describes it as a, “Newness of life, a resurrection like his, and being set free from sin.” As much as the water puts to death the sinner, only the Word remains to keep life alive in Christ. It is not an internal ability or strength, since the sinner only tries to exploit God’s grace. Instead, it is an external reality sustained as the Savior works by His Word and Sacrament. As said, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Baptism is the power to live with the Word for our justification. If was just about water we could be on our way. Instead, the Word keeps giving life for us by Jesus. The Good News magazine this month is all about baptism. It notes how many churches pay no attention to the effect of original sin after baptism. Lutherans alone teach, “even after Baptism, a residual ‘root’ of Original Sin remains behind—a root which keeps resprouting and needs to be suppressed by the power of God’s living Word and Spirit.”[[2]](#footnote-2) It means the sinful nature in us unchecked by the Word and Sacrament spirals out of control. As Luther states, “Where this amendment of life does not take place but the old man is given free rein and continually grows stronger, Baptism is not being used but resisted” (Tappert 445:68). Jesus has the only power for life. He speaks forgiveness to the saddest sin, restores life to the ways of death, and turns the sinner away from self. As St. Paul said, “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” This is not merely for the end of life, but life at the present by Word and Sacrament. It is to receive the Holy Spirit from Christ, so God’s presence can daily be with us to handle all the people and problems of a sinful world.

The Roman world took advantage of life. It sucked dry every ounce of pleasure before death. This is what sinners do when there is nothing left to face in life but the Law. However, St. Paul made it clear, “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.” What appears to consume my life by a watery tomb of baptism. Only promises more for Jesus says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). This abundance extends beyond death to life everlasting to be with the risen Jesus. In truth, Christian funerals proclaimed to pagans a great witness. Those having died in The Faith were better off than the living. Maybe it even opened the door to see no need to steal life by aborting others. It all stood on the power of Jesus’ Name in baptism who freely says, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Revelation 1:17-18).

Baptism is the power to rein free forever before Jesus. It does not feel and look this way in a sinful world. At the present, there are many freedoms offered, but even Lawlessness leaves humanity emptied by sin, dead to life, and condemned by the delusions. This is why we prayed to the Father in the Name of Jesus saying, “Make all who are baptized in His Name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life.” True freedom comes not by the hands of men. God already said at Jesus’ baptism, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” This is the good news put on our lives by baptism. It is what goes out to all people. Sin, death, the devil, not even the Law, has a final say over life for it belongs in faith eternally to the Savior. “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.” Jesus makes the miracle of baptism His power of salvation at work in a sinful world. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. http://www.lutheransforlife.org/article/moving-the-world-from-killing-to-caring/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Good News Issue 40, 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)