

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Romans 6:3-11

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. 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. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 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.

The Law of God is good and wise
And sets His will before our eyes.
Shows us the way of righteousness,
And dooms to death when we transgress.¹

The Law is good. When God gave the Law to Moses and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai, He began by saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex. 20:2). These are not the cruel, crushing decrees of a dictator. They are the kind, loving words of Israel's Redeemer. God had saved them from their enemy, the Egyptians, and led them safely through the water on dry ground, having chosen them to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the people who were on the face of the earth. The promises were theirs. And here, on the mountain of God, God taught them how to live like it, by loving the LORD their God with all their heart, soul, and mind, and their neighbors as themselves.

That was a long time ago, but the Law is still good. "Not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished," Christ says (Mt. 5:18). But it doesn't just set God's will before our eyes. It does do that, as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, showing us the way of righteousness. But it also dooms to death when we transgress. Sin is a big deal. It's a violation of what God has called good. So, when we cross that line, when we live contrary to God's Law, there are consequences, namely death and hell.

And we cross the line a lot more than we think. That's the point of today's Gospel lesson, where Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You

¹ "The Law of God Is Good and Wise" (Lutheran Service Book 579, st. 1).

shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Mt. 5:21-23). You see, we may be able to convince ourselves, as the Pharisees did, that we’ve done a pretty good job at keeping the Law, especially when it comes to the “big” sins, like murder and adultery. But here our Lord dispels any such delusions of grandeur by pointing out that sin is not just the outward, physical act, but even our thoughts and words are suspect as well. Oh, we may not have murdered in deed, but we have been angry with one another. We have insulted one another, calling each other “brainless,” which is the literal translation. And so, our righteousness falls far short, and we are liable to judgment, both now and forever.

And you can do this with any of the commandments, by the way. Jesus also says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman [or a man] with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her [or him] in his heart” (Mt. 5:27-28). You can steal without physically taking anything. Words can irreparably hurt someone, more than sticks and stones.

What then shall we say? That the Law is sin? By no means! Even when it shows our sin, the Law is good. *Especially* when it shows our sin. For Paul writes toward the end of Romans chapter 5, “Now the Law came in to increase the trespass.” Not to decrease it, mind you, not to make sin less, but to magnify it, to make it worse. Why? “So that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:21). So long as we think we can save ourselves, we are lost. It’s when we have nowhere left to go that the Gospel truly shines. “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” The Law is good, even when it accuses, because that’s how God leads us to Christ. He shows our sin in order to forgive it. And because of His death, resurrection, and ascension, grace *superabounds* for us! We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

“What shall we say then?” Paul says at the beginning of chapter 6, just before today’s Epistle. “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” In other words, now that our sins are forgiven, we can do whatever we want, right? Steal, murder, and commit adultery to our heart’s content? Say it with me: “By no means!” He says, “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” That’s just it. We *can’t*. But what does that mean? I don’t know about you, but I don’t *feel* dead to sin. Most days, I feel very much *alive* to sin. As David says in the Psalms, “I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (51:3). Or, as Paul will say later in Romans, “I know that nothing good dwells in me. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do

not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing" (7:18-19). So, how can Paul say that we are "dead to sin"?

He can say that, because *Christ* died to sin, and we are baptized into Him. Paul goes on, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. 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." Baptism is no empty sign, but it's the moment when God saved you from your enemy and led you safely through the water, having chosen you in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3). In Baptism, which is the washing of water with the Word, the promises of God, we are united with Christ, joined to Him in such a way that His death now counts for our death. When we went down into the water, we went down with Him into the grave. And when we came back up again, we were raised to a whole new life. We died to sin. Our debt was paid. And we entered into the kingdom of God..

Paul continues, "We know that our old self was crucified with Him [Christ] in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." Notice how he talks about sin as a ruler. Before Christ, we were ruled by sin. Sin was our master, and we served it quite willingly. But sin isn't our lord anymore. "For the one who has died has been set free from sin." We were washed, we were sanctified, we were justified in the name of our *new* Lord, Jesus Christ, who has brought us out of darkness into His marvelous light, claiming us as His own. He has rescued us from our slavery. We are free from sin and its consequences.

Free for what? Paul says, "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has any dominion over Him." Notice that, for a time, death *did* have dominion of Christ. It really did exercise lordship over Him. Christ truly suffered, died and was buried for our sins. But not anymore: Christ is risen, and now *He* rules over death. "For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God." And so it is with us. We are dead to sin, because *Christ* died to sin, and we are baptized into Him. God accepts His death as having been died for us. So, we believe that we too shall live, just as He is risen from the dead.

And that life begins even now. That newness of life Paul mentioned earlier isn't something we're waiting for. It's right now. We are not to sin that grace may abound. That's not what we've been saved for. We have died to sin. So don't let it rule over you. Don't let it fool you into thinking that sin is not a big deal, or that with the help of the Law you can be your own lord. You serve the Lord Jesus now. You fear, love, and trust

in Him. That's who you are, who you were saved to be. It's not easy. There's always a part of us that *wants* to run back to our old master, to presume on the riches of God's kindness and patience, not knowing that His kindness is meant to lead us to repentance.

But even when you don't *feel* dead to sin, when you fail to be who you were saved to be, you must nevertheless consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. It's God's Word that matters, not your feelings. And God's Word says, "You are Mine." That's who God sees you as in His Son. And who are any of us to argue with God?

In † Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria