

JOINED FOR LIFE
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

ROM 6:1-11
JAN 11, 2015

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.

This morning when sun came up and new day started,
you may have taken a shower before getting dressed.
Did you put back on same dirty clothes you had taken off?
That would defeat the purpose of getting clean.
This is Paul's point as scripture readings on 1st Sun. after Epiph.
speak to us about new beginnings,
not as result of our New Year's resolutions
which may already be broken
but as result of God's Spirit, water and word,
which connect us to Christ.
In first reading creation begins as God speaks his word
and Spirit is over the water as light appears
Same characters show up in Gospel reading
as Jesus begins his ministry by being revealed
in water of baptism as Spirit comes down & God speaks.
Same characters show up in our baptism
as the Spirit comes down on us and God speaks
identifying us as his beloved children
so that now we can live in this new identity.
every day of our lives.

BEING JOINED WITH CHRIST GIVES US NEW IDENTITIES.
JESUS JOINED WITH SINNERS TO FREE US FROM SIN.
WE ARE JOINED WITH CHRIST TO LIVE NEW LIVES.

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There is story of young man who kept beating head against wall

He was treated by psychologist who discovered reasons:

It came from an urge to express of his anger
and was also means of manipulation to get his own way

But even when he understood this, he kept doing it.

Asked why, he said, because it felt so good to stop.

Continuing to sin is like beating our head against a wall.

Sin is expression of anger and rebellion against God.

We also tend to think it is a means to get what we want:

That sexual immorality will get us affection,
lies will gain us respect and confidence
coveting things will bring us happiness

But actually sinning does opposite of giving what we want.

It is beating our head against a wall.

So, Paul says, why would we keep on sinning?

He speaks to those who seem to think it feels good to stop.

Some may reason, since God keeps forgiving, we might as well
go back & sin again because it feels so good to be forgiven.

like someone who ruined body by unhealthy habits
and had surgery that saved their life

thinking they are now free to go back to same old habits.

Paul says, why do I want to go back to what leads to death?

It is because the old self in us still likes sin
and is so comfortable in the old ways.

We are like those in abusive or dysfunctional relationship

who, when they finally get out of that relationship
end up in another dysfunctional relationship

with different person because they are still same person.

For things to really change, they need to be different person.

It sometimes happens that people who feel trapped in situation
they cannot endure - massive debt, miserable relationship,
terrible responsibility, unbearable guilt, etc.

may commit suicide because they see death
as only way to be free of it.

But others in similar situations have only faked their deaths
and secretly started lives over again as different person.

Paul here recognizes that he who has died is set free
from that in which they were trapped in life, such as sin,
but he says the way this happens for us
is that Jesus is the one who has died & now lives again
and when we are joined with him through our Baptism
we too are freed from being trapped in a life of sin
and have a new life on the other side of death.

As his identity was revealed & declared at his baptism.
our new identity is given and declared at our baptism.
So what does it take for us to be joined with Christ in new life?
It happens because he joined himself with us in our death.

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body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be
enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin.

¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in
Christ Jesus.

Some of us are old enough to remember
when you had to lick a stamp to put it on a letter.
That little bit of moisture caused them to stick together
so that they both went everywhere together.
I picture the moisture our baptism as doing this for us.
It causes us to be stuck to/united with Christ
so that we go through death with him
and go with him back to life again.

But what happens in our baptism starts with Jesus' baptism.
He was like soap that went into water of baptism first
to make it able to remove our sins from us.
His baptism was the beginning of his immersing himself
in all that we sinners are and experience.

He who was pure and holy was washed
not because he needed it but because we need it
and he was doing everything for us in our place.
When he was baptized in muddy Jordan river
all the sins others washed off there washed onto him.

The other day, I was washing hands before lunch
along with bunch of younger boys of our school.
I noticed they had some paper tattoos they had been given.
They held tattoo on back of hand as the ran water over it
and so it stuck to their hand.
As their washing made a mark stick to them,
Jesus' baptism made our sins stick to him.
This is how he became a marked man, doomed to die.
His immersing himself in our sinfulness
was completed in the bloodbath of the cross.
There he completely paid for all our sins.
They became his and he took them to his grave.
He has taken care of our sins once and for all, so that now...

WE ARE JOINED WITH CHRIST TO LIVE NEW LIVES.

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.

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.

There are anecdotal stories of those who had heart transplants:
a woman with sudden new craving for beer & spicy food,
another who hated football began to love it and boxing,
man had newfound enjoyment of classical music.
It was discovered in each case, these were characteristics
of those who had died and donated their organs to them.
So it was like the life of the donor
was somehow joined together with the life of recipient.
Science is just beginning to try to figure out how this happens.
but Paul tells us that there is another kind of unity
that results in a change of desires and lifestyle
because we are joined with Jesus who
died to give us new lives.
He now lives in and through us.
Paul makes point that he died once and for all.
Having risen again, he is not going to die again.
His point is that we, who died with him through baptism,
are to be dead to sin once and for all
and not go back again to spiritual death in sin.

This happens not by our own feeble efforts
but as a result of God's powerful word at work in us,
which is what gives us new desires for what is good
and leads us to transformed lifestyles.
In the beginning, God's word, "Let there be light" made it true.
God's word in baptism, claiming us as his own children
and creating in us new life makes it true.
God's word declaring our forgiveness
so that we have new life each day makes it true.
Here again, God's word that this bread and wine
is Jesus' own body and blood makes it true.
Here again, he donates his body to us,
and we receive life from his death
so that we are not only able to go on living
but like one who's heart was stopped on operating table
and they started over with a new one
the life we live is a new life, with new desires
as we live joined together with Christ.

BEING JOINED WITH CHRIST GIVES US NEW IDENTITIES.

There is no need to go back to beating our head
against the wall with futile sinful behavior.
We are free from being trapped in sin
by being joined in death with Christ & starting over.

This happens because...

JESUS JOINED WITH SINNERS TO FREE US FROM SIN.

He immersed himself in our sinfulness
which stuck to him until he finished it
with his death in our place and rose again, so that now...

WE ARE JOINED WITH CHRIST TO LIVE NEW LIVES.

He who lives, never to die again,
lives in us, giving us a new way of life
and giving us a life that never ends.