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Pentecost IV & Proper 7

June 21, 2026

Text: Romans 6:12 – 23

Title: Baptized into God's Greater Story (based on the series "God's Greater Story" produced by Dr. D. Schmitt, Concordia STL.)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Last week we started a series of readings from St. Paul's letter to the Romans which will continue throughout most the summer and into the fall. Romans is a missionary letter, written to a church that Paul had never visited. Yet, in his words, Paul offers a vision of God at work in the world. Paul may not know these people but he does know their God, and he knows the way their God works in the world. Knowing that, Paul gives them a glimpse of the greater story of God. He trusts that when they hear God's greater story, they will see how God has brought them into something greater than living in Rome in the first century AD.

God's word is like that. It changes how you live. It reveals to you something bigger than yourself and makes you part of something larger than your life. It worked like that then, and it still works like that now.

Centuries have passed since St. Paul wrote this letter. Rome has fallen. Empires have come and gone. The way we relate to one another and the world around us has changed dramatically. Yet the work of God continues. God is still at work through His Word and Spirit. And so, we come to meditate on God's words to the Roman Christians. To stand at the window of time and look across the centuries. Starting last week with Romans 5, we will read to the end of the letter. We will see the story of God unfold each week. Today, we see God's work in Holy Baptism as He joins us to the power of the resurrected Christ. Then, we will focus on God's greater story, God's greater people, and God's greater plan for you. Watch and listen as God

makes you part of His larger story. Catch your reflection in the glass of time's window. It will change the way you live in God's world.

Today, we are well into the book of Romans, in chapter 6. It's strange to start reading in the middle of a letter. It makes more sense to start at the beginning. To hear Paul introducing himself to the Romans, and then to follow the flow of the letter. But we are going to start with Romans 6 because sometimes that's the way God works in the world. He brings us into the middle of an on-going conversation. We overhear people talking and over time we discover who they are. Our family in Christ. When you were born, you entered a world already set in motion. You didn't know who people were as they passed you from person to person at the hospital. Over time, however, you recognized voices and put together stories. Strangers became family and a simple gesture could remind you of love.

In a similar way, God's work does not start with you. No, you have been brought into God's family. You were not there in the very beginning. God alone existed before anything else was made. God alone created this world out of nothing. He spoke and the blooming plants appeared. Mountains soared. Waves crashed. After preparing a world for his creatures to discover, preparing a garden for them to live in, preparing food for them to eat, day and night for them to rise and sleep, after all of that, God took the dust of the earth, formed it, and breathed into it the breath of life. God made Adam and Eve and brought them into His story.

What God did at Creation, He continues to do in a new way for each generation. Although Adam and Eve sinned and brought death, the punishment of sin, into the world, God continued to work. He sent His Son, Jesus, to bear the punishment of death, and to prepare a place for His people. A new creation. A place free from death. A place where God's people will rejoice in the goodness of God and the wonder of a New Creation. In baptism, God brings people

into His story. He gathers people from all ages and places, from all languages and cultures, into His kingdom. The infant in the arms and the aged on her deathbed. Those who are rich, and those who are poor. God brings all people into His story through Holy Baptism. In baptism, we are joined to the death and resurrection of Christ and there we enter the story in the middle. This story reaches back before creation, when God loved us before the foundations of the world, and this story reaches forward to a new creation when Christ will return and restore all things.

God's story doesn't begin with you, and it doesn't end with you. But it does include you. By grace, you have a place and a purpose and you are part of His people. And to understand that, to understand how God brings you into His much larger story, it's helpful to start in the middle of Paul's letter. Because here Paul brings you to the waters of baptism, and here you see what it means to be buried into the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul describes this moment most clearly when he writes, "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."

Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. That is what and who you are. This is a hard truth for us to hold onto. God's work is eternal. This promise of God is certain and lasts for all time. But sometimes it's hard for us to hold on to this truth of who we are. It's as if this is only a moment for us, especially as Lutherans. Ask almost any Lutheran about their Christian life experience and I would guess that these are not the first words off their lips. Romans 6 is not our favorite text. Ask Lutherans about their life experience and they might quote Paul, but they might quote Paul from Romans 7: "The good that I would do, I do not and the evil that I would not do, that I do." This life of struggle, this internal division, this fighting of the flesh and the Spirit, this is a typical way for Lutherans to speak about the Christian life. Yet, Paul asks us to say something else about ourselves. Paul says, "Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in

Christ Jesus.” Sometimes you wonder if Lutherans have all received bibles where the pages in Romans were stuck together so that they go directly from Romans 3 to Romans 7. Paul asks us this morning to peel apart those pages and to take a deep long look into the reflective pool of baptism. There we see our reflection in the waters and learn to say, “I am dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Think about it for a minute. Paul has described sin with power and force in Romans. It’s a sin which enslaves, a sin which imprisons and rules. That sin, Paul says, consider yourselves dead to it. Paul has described God in wonder and power in Romans. This is the God who created all things, the God who rose from the dead, the God who now reigns in the glory and wonder of heaven. The God who sends His Spirit among His people, the God who frees, who lives, and who brings about a marvelous new creation. This God, Paul says, consider yourselves alive to this God in Christ Jesus. Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. For Paul this is the meaning of your baptism. As Paul says, “we were buried with him in baptism to His death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Therefore, consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

I hope you can see how different Paul’s ways are from the ways of the world. Our world recognizes the power of sin. But it fights sin by asking us to remember it. If we remember our sin, we will avoid it in the future, we’ll try harder, and we’ll do better. Or so the thinking goes.

Paul offers another way different from that futility. As you read through Romans, you find that Paul takes you down a darkening hallway and sets before you the severity of human sin. You see the power of sin in the world. The power of sin in your own life. It affects all so that none are free from its dominion and all stand sinful before God. But Paul does not stop there. Paul goes deeper than that. He takes you to the darkness of helplessness. In the absence of light,

you feel a slab of stone, and you hear the sound of dripping water. Paul takes you to the moment of Holy Baptism when you were buried with Christ.

Deeper than your sin and darker than your suffering lies the suffering of God. The death of Christ for the sin of the world. Those who see here see only by the Light of God. This death is the punishment of sin. And this resurrection is Life and Light for the world. "Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." God has entered your world, taken your sin upon Himself, and in His resurrection raised you to a New Life. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, you too walk in newness of life. Paul brings us from the darkness of our sin that plays over and over in our minds to the wonderful reality of the death and resurrection of our Savior who takes us by the hand and leads us into New Life in Him. We are brought into His Kingdom, and we live as servants of our gracious God.

For this reason, Paul calls upon the Romans then and on us today to present ourselves to Christ Jesus as people who have been brought from death to life. We present our bodies, our minds, our skills, our talents, as instruments for righteousness. There is a beautiful mystery to being part of God's story. We often find ourselves amazed at what God will do. We bring our lives to God, present ourselves to Him, and God uses our lives in the unfolding of His kingdom. As Christians, we confess that we are dead to sin and alive to Christ. And we present our bodies to God as instruments for righteousness. There is no telling what God will do through you as He works in His world. In Holy Baptism, He has joined you to the death and resurrection of His Son. Your life is part of God's greater story. As you now stand before God about to enter the world once again, for a moment, you have the courage, you have the joy, and you have the privilege to say, "I am dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.