

First Sunday after Epiphany
January 8, 2023
“Your baptismal resuscitation through Christ!”
(Romans 6:4-5)

By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,
Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 1st Sunday after Epiphany is
from our Epistle reading Romans 6:4-5.

**“Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as
Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also
should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the
likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His
resurrection,”**

Here ends our text.

That “we also should walk in newness of life” - that is, that we might have,
possess, use, and enjoy this new ability to walk in newness of life, right now! in the
present! and then, this new life which we possess carries into an eternal life
through the resurrection! So that, there is never a moment when the Christian, the
baptized Christian doesn't have life, now or eternally!

What a joyous state of being this is. These verses give understanding to the very
words that Jesus spoke to Martha at the death of her brother Lazarus.

**“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me,
though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall
never die.” (John 11:25-26)**

For Christ is life and Christ is the resurrection. And whoever believes in Him lives
now in this moment and shall never die!! What does Jesus then ask Martha? **“Do
you believe this?”**

Jesus' words are so fantastic, even in the face of death, that one must take a
moment, to pause, and ponder them. Do you believe this fellow brother and sister
in Christ? This is the heart and very foundation of our faith!

For our faith depends on being linked, on being united, on being connected to He who is the Life, Jesus Christ. “He who believes in Me” has all these gifts. Lifeless Lazarus in the tomb has life even as Jesus and Martha speak because of his faith in Jesus. And to show that Jesus is the source, giver and sustainer of life, He calls Lazarus from the tomb in which his physical body had been resting dead for 4 days. And Lazarus comes out walking, physically alive! Jesus resuscitated his physical body – no CPR needed. No defibrillator needed. Just Jesus’ powerful word, “Lazarus, come forth!”.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, of what Paul is saying in Romans 6 is that all of you, believers in Christ, have died – spiritually. And all of you believers in Christ, also live in newness of life! How? Through your baptism! Through this means of grace which God has given to you a most fantastic resuscitation has taken place! You have died to sin and now walk in newness of life!!

When you were baptized, Jesus performed spiritual resuscitation on you. For there was a death and a burial in your baptism, but there was also a coming forth from the tomb as your name was also called out by Jesus! What is dead? Sin!

For Paul begins chapter 6 with these words:

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”

Oh, the temptation of the devil tries to twist the goodness of God’s grace into a license to sin! So the temptation comes to us like this. Since God’s grace abounds, don’t you want it to abound more by sinning more? And we, especially we Lutherans, who know the power of God’s grace to forgive sin, and know that God continues to forgive all my sin, might be tempted to think, “one more sin won’t matter because I know that God’s grace will abound to cover it up”.

To which Paul responds to each of us, **“2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”**

Perish the thought! That’s not who you are! You are not alive to sin and dead to newness of life! No! You have died to sin! It’s dead to you. It has no power over you. It cannot condemn you! It cannot call you guilty. Sin is separated from you just as there is a separation at death from one’s loved one who is buried in the grave. That’s where your sin is – buried! Buried at the foot of the cross!

For this is what baptism does for you. It unites you with the death of Christ Jesus. Jesus death to sin becomes your death to sin in baptism. Jesus took upon Himself your sin at the cross and through baptism you also became dead to your sin. For it no longer has power over Jesus. And if it no longer has power or mastery over Jesus then it no longer has power over you! You are dead to sin. So, keep sin separate from you. It's no longer your life. You have a new life in Christ!

Your baptism washes your sins away from you daily. And though the old flesh still clings to us, it is daily crucified by our confession of sin and daily our new spirit rises through the forgiveness of sins. Daily God resuscitates you as your sins are buried at the cross and you rise a forgiven child of God. For just as Christ rose again, so also you are united in His resurrection in newness of life!

The phrase that our text says is “peripatato” – literally – walk around in newness of life. The aborigines of Africa have a rite of passage for young men called “a walkabout”. They have to go into the desert for 6 months to make a spiritual transition to manhood.

Fellow believer in Christ, you're spiritual rite of passage into a new life doesn't require you to survive in the desert for 6 months. In fact, it doesn't require you to do anything. For baptism is not a rite but a sacrament, a gift from God to you. He graciously made the journey into the desert for you and was tempted but never sinned for you. He graciously placed Himself under the law at His circumcision, at His baptism to give us His righteousness through faith in Him! And Jesus died our death and rose again so that we have died to sin and been raised to newness of life!

Your walkabout is your life right now in Jesus! You are living without sadness or fear of death in Jesus for it has lost its sting!

There was a moment this week when the world was confronted with death on live TV. On Monday night, a player for the Buffalo Bills football team made a routine tackle, stood up, adjusted his chinstrap and then crumbled to the ground, lifeless. Yes, lifeless. As difficult as it is to watch, we're used to seeing players break bones, tear ACLs or MCLs, pectoral muscles or even have spinal trauma in which they are stabilized on a stretcher and taken to the hospital. But this was different.

This was something which the players in the modern era and most watchers on television had never witnessed. This 24-year-old athlete at the peak of his physical life had no heartbeat and was not breathing. It became apparent very quickly that this was a serious situation by the reaction of the players. Tears were streaming

down their eyes, and looks of disbelief and shock were on their faces. Their fellow football player had no life. CPR was immediately administered for 9 minutes. There was no guarantee that Damar would be brought back to life. The television announcers were at a loss for words. This sport of entertainment quickly united us with the reality of mortality of even the strongest and fastest. Players got on a knee in prayer and the announcers said over and over again, “all we can do is pray”.

As I watched and prayed to the one true God, I hoped that others were praying to Him though His name was never mentioned. And then came the news that Damar was resuscitated, given oxygen and then he was immediately taken to the hospital by ambulance. The trauma of the moment was great for all who were in the very presence of those frantically working to revive Damar. The game was suspended. There is much more to life than the game of football. One’s own mortality is pondered at moments like this.

And many people continued to pray. Would Damar make it? Was there damage to his brain? In the days that followed this week, Damar’s charity which had a few thousand dollars in it received millions of dollars. The public wanted to somehow show support. And later in the week the news was good that Damar was neurologically intact. The breathing tube was removed and he even face timed with his teammates.

His first question that he wrote to the doctors was “who won the game?”. And the doctors replied, “you did”. “You won the game of life.” Thanks be to God who is the giver of life! Yes, the trainer who administered CPR was praised for his heroic quick actions but all praise goes to God who brought life back into the body of Damar. He won this victory of the game of life.

But the greater game of life is the victory over sin, death and the devil. We cannot win that game, nor anyone in this world. Like Damar, we lay helplessly on the turf of this world with no power to bring ourselves back alive. But the one who works feverishly on our soul is the Holy Spirit! In our baptism He resuscitates us and gives us new life! For in baptism the Holy Spirit unites us in faith to Jesus, to His death and His resurrection.

Baptism is so much more than a simple rite of the church. No, there is a death and burial of sin, and there is rising to new life by the power of the Holy Spirit! God does it all and we rejoice. The trauma of death is gone and we live in the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So that as He was raised from the dead, we too have life now and will be raised with a new body like His at the last day!

So Paul concludes in our text:

“12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

We daily say “no” to sin live and live in the righteousness of God. For you are no longer under the law, you’ve been resuscitated. You live under grace, abounding grace! All praise to God! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)