

“We Belong to God”
June 2, 2019
St. Paul’s UCC Church
Rev. Mary Beth Mardis-LeCroy

Romans 6:1-14

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

I heard this story one time – I have no idea if it is historically accurate, but, how does that old saying go? Never let the truth get in the way of good story? Anyway, the story goes like this: Once upon a time, there was a war-like people called the Gauls who lived in what is present-day France and Belgium. (This part, by the way, is true). Anyway, these Gauls were worshippers of the ancient Druid gods, but after the Romans conquered them, some missionaries began going into their territory, trying to convert them to Christianity.

Here’s where we get into the “this-may-not-be-entirely-true” part of the story. Legend has it that when a Gaul consented to be baptized, he or she would agree to go to the water (usually a river or stream somewhere), but when the missionary got to the “dunking” part of the baptism, the Gaul would hold one arm high in the air, not allowing it to even skim the surface of the water. The missionaries scratched their heads about this, but just chalked it up to some peculiar Gallic mannerism.

But soon enough, the missionaries learned the reason for this strange custom. When the next skirmish broke out, the Gauls grabbed their clubs or swords or axes, and with a ferocious battle cry, began to destroy their enemies in a most un-Christian manner. When one of the missionaries asked how a baptized person could behave in such a way, one of the Gauls replied, “Ah, but this arm is not baptized!”

The Gauls thought they had found a loop-hole. They thought they had come up with a system where, if they were not *completely* immersed in the waters of baptism, the un-baptized part of them could behave in all sorts of wretched and un-Christian ways. Not belonging entirely to God through Christ, they could go back to their old ways, to the world as they knew it. They could go back to their status quo: to war, to greed, to hatred and violence. The Gauls thought they had found a way to keep a part of themselves apart from God.

This morning we read again from Paul’s letter to the Romans. Today, we are in chapter 6. To get us situated in what Paul is doing here, it’s good to know what he says in the section that comes right before. So right before this, in chapter 5, Paul starts to develop his Adam-Christ typology. What is this, preacher? Remember, according to Genesis, Adam is the first human. And, according to Paul, all of humanity was linked in with Adam’s sin. Because Adam sinned, we are all sinners. Thus saith Paul.

But Paul sees Jesus as the second founder of the human race, set up in direct parallel with Adam. If in Adam, one sin means judgement for all; then in Christ, one good life means salvation for all.

Okay. Back to the passage for today. Our reading picks up at the beginning of chapter 6, where Paul uses one of his favorite rhetorical tricks: Raising a question he thinks the reader may be asking him or herself, and then responding to it. So if you are following Paul’s argument about the universality of sin in Adam and universality of grace in Christ, you just might find yourself asking: *Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?* In other words, “Well, if through Christ we are already saved, does that mean that anything goes?”

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? Paul produces a feisty answer to his own rhetorical question: “By no means!” Other translations for this might include: “Heck no!” “No way, Jose!” Or “Na-uh”!

Paul’s theology of grace is so robust that one could almost be forgiven for assuming that “anything goes.” But in response, Paul talks about baptism. *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*

We have now arrived at Paul’s theology of baptism! For Paul, baptism is the act that unites our lives with Christ. It plunges us into his death, and into his life. He died; we died. He has been buried; we have been buried. He lives and we will live with him. In

other words, we are completely immersed in the same waters as Christ. We are completely covered by him.

Here's another way to think about it: through the waters of our baptism, we *belong to God*: totally. Body, mind, and spirit. Everything we are, everything we do, belongs to God. Our *whole lives* belong to God, which means we can't keep living the same ol' ways we used to live, the ways the world tells us to live. Because we belong to God through Christ, we are *freed* to stop living according to the selfish, violent, oppressive rules of this world. We don't have to live with the status quo: kill or be killed, you gets yours and I'll get mine, whoever dies with the most toys wins, etc. Paul would no doubt call all that sin, and he would say, "By no means do we keep living that way!"

Instead, we are completely immersed in the same life, and death, as Christ. We are to live for the same world Christ showed us... *and* we can start now: we can live by sharing our stuff, making peace in a world bent on war, doing justice, loving kindness, serving God in all that we do.

Think again about those stubborn Gauls, the ones who insisted on keeping one arm out of the baptismal waters so that they could go back to their "old ways" – the status quo – whenever they pleased.

Those Gauls were missing something so important, so vital: to be a follower of Jesus Christ, to be a child of the God of Heaven and Earth, means that – whether we like it or not – we have become completely immersed in the grace and Lordship of our living, loving God.

We can be like those Gauls, though. Think of all the things we'd rather keep God out of: our "ugly" stuff, our memories that seem too painful to even name... our bodily stuff, our finances, our so-called "worldly" things... we tend to think this stuff is over here by itself, and that God should have nothing to do with it.

But like the Gauls, when we keep God out of the "unbecoming" parts of our lives, we're missing something pretty important. In baptism, we share the life, and death, of Christ. We cannot go back to the status quo of this world. All that we have, all that we do, all that we are – everything belongs to God, 100%. Why do you think we pray the Lord's Prayer every time we gather here? Why do we pray "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done"? We pray it because we need to be reminded that God wants to take hold of, and rule our lives – *all* of our lives, body, mind, and spirit.

We pray it to remind ourselves that we no longer live by the rules of this world.

And one of the most important ways we remind ourselves of this is by coming here, to this Table. Here, we eat this bread, and we drink this cup, and we remember again that, through Christ, we belong to God: body, mind, spirit... arms, legs, heads and

hearts. We are already saved, but that doesn't mean we go back to the status quo, the old ways of doing things. It doesn't mean we go back to the rules of this world. Instead, this bread and this cup remind us to share our stuff, to work for peace, to seek justice for all of creation, and to love God and each other with everything we've got.

Thanks be to God.