

Romans 6:1b-11**Summer Sermon Series: The Book of Romans****The Basics of the Christian Faith, One Word at a Time: *Buried***

In Exodus chapter 32, Moses came down from Mt Sinai holding the ten commandments and this is what he found. The people that God had rescued and preserved and sustained and had been called and chosen to be his very own special people, his chosen nation, were acting like none of that ever happened. They had become comfortable in their status, they had become impatient with their Lord they became distracted by the ways of the world around them, and so they gave themselves over to their own shameful desires, and they created for themselves a god that at the time they thought would be more enjoyable to serve. When Moses came down the mountain, this is how he found them: singing and dancing, engaging in sinful behavior and worshipping the golden calf. This is how he found them: enthralled in the arms of idolatry, giving themselves over to shameful pleasures, and actively participating in full-blown sinful revelry. And so, Moses called them to task, and he called them back to God. He awakened some to their egregious offense and made them see that this was not simply harmless behavior that helped them pass the time, but this was harmful, dangerous, rebellion towards God. Others would not be so soon convinced, and ultimately, they were punished with the sword. Death came to those who rebelled and who would not repent. Moses came down the mountain and this is what he found, God's people wrapped up in sin and loving it, and it had to stop. It could not continue because the people had been set apart. It could not continue because God's promise had to be preserved. Extreme measures were taken by our God, who is both a God of justice and a God of mercy. Moses call out to them and called them to follow the LORD. (*Read Exodus 32:15-29 for a review of this account.*)

And so, as we remember the account of the golden calf, as we strain our ears to hear that distant and ancient noise, as we imagine what that sound of wild singing and dancing and revelry sounded like, we know one thing for sure; it was wrong. We are quick to identify Aaron and his mob of restless revelers as foolish, as their disobedience as outlandish, harmful, and beyond excuse. We might even call it sickening. They should have known better! How could they! The holy presence of God was right there. The LORD had done so much for these people and now the people were running wild with blatant disregard for God's Word and it was shameful.

We think about a scene like this we know such disobedience and defiance and rebellion and sin just needed to be addressed, just needed to be stopped. This is not what God

called his chosen people to be! But things get personal when we consider Paul's rhetorical question here in Romans 6. ***Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?***

How about you and me? Is there anything that we are doing, any sin that we are engaging in that just needs to stop? Or in more general terms, should we just keep on sinning because as sinners we just can't help it, and God is going to forgive us anyway?

By no means!

Earlier in Romans chapter 5, Paul made the startling assertion that where sin increased, grace increased all the more. With these words Paul is not advocating on a free pass to sin, but he is simply highlighting the incredible nature, the wonderful reach of the gospel. However, with these words before us today he anticipates a perverse logic that a person might use to argue, "if that's the case, where sin increased, grace increased all the more, then why not keep on sinning because we are covered anyway, right?" As Christians, such logic should make us uncomfortable to say the least. To live in direct disobedience to the God who has done so much for you is unloving. To live in careless defiance of God's word indicates that you forgot or do not really care that you are connected and reconciled to God, that you bear his name and his gift of righteousness and atonement. To live in a way that ignores God's holy will reflects an attitude that your relationship with the almighty is inconsequential. Such a sin-embracing, or sin tolerant attitude, for the child of God, is unacceptable. When Moses comes down the mountain he doesn't just shrug his shoulders and say, well that's just how people are and God will forgive us anyway. And yet this is the kind of trap that we fall into so often as we live in this world that distracts us and entices us to live for ourselves and to give into our desires. The twisted logic is, that this is okay, because that's just what people do. We are so prone to sin, that we should just give in.

As Christians, the sounds and sights and actions of our sin should not just be a natural and expected part of life, they should be appalling. To abuse the relationship that God so graciously established with you, to ignore his holy will, to have a person or a group of people give themselves over to their own desires and to things of this world is unacceptable. It is without excuse. This is not just harmless behavior, this is rebellion against God that brings shame to his name and destruction and woe upon those who continue in such sinful ways.

So, Paul describes the Christian faith to all believers in extreme measures to help us see how vital this all is. Paul talks about our faith and life of faith in absolute and severe terms. He uses life and death terminology. First, he says when God in his grace found us, we were dead in our sin, still separated from God because of the shame of sin, and yet Christ died for us. While we were still sinners, enemies of God, Christ died for us. He passionately describes how death came to all men because all sinned. But now, thanks be to God in Christ Jesus, we have been given the gift of life that overflows to the many. Through Christ life reigns and eternal life is his gracious gift. And these words of Paul reflect the urgency and the importance of the message that Jesus himself speaks to us in

John chapter 5. Our Savior speaks in similar soaring and all-important terms. ²⁴ ***“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.***

The Bible speaks about this all in such extreme measures, in life and death terminology, because this rescue from death and hell, is extreme. It is of vital importance. It is of eternal significance. Dead in sin; made alive by grace. And so, it would only follow that the apostle Paul would also speak in such extremes about the life we are to live for God as his redeemed and chosen people. He takes that striking terminology of death and resurrection he applies it to our new life in Christ. ***We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*** We died to sin... We were buried with Christ through baptism. ***⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with.*** Through baptism, through faith, we have been blessed with this life altering truth. We died to sin. Our old self was crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be done away with. We were buried with Christ through baptism and just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. In his grace and mercy God cleanses us. He makes us new. He connects us intimately and effectively to Christ Jesus our Lord and the blessings that he has won for us. Blessing that are of the utmost importance. We were buried with him, crucified with him, raised with Christ, so that through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. Buried with Christ!

We don't always view our faith with this extreme perspective, do we? Too often we follow Christ with a lack of commitment that conveniently leaves room for sin. We fail to take on that practice that we have died to sin, instead we hang around temptations, and we let certain sins hang around us. And then maybe when we are in certain company or when we think no one is looking we breathe life into those sins, taking up old sinful habits, giving ourselves over to our own selfish desires, living like everyone else for a while. Without thinking much about it all, we serve the idols of money or pleasure or leisure with our time and our devotion and ignore or neglect our relationship with God as we drift from his embrace of Word and Sacrament. Maybe we go out and party and give ourselves over to sinful indulgences that we know are wrong. Or maybe it is the case that even if we are mindful to avoid the blatant debauchery that this world has to offer, we still fashion for ourselves more conservative household gods: as we put work, our family, our friends, our children, our grandchildren and a long list of other interests and activities, in front of the God who created us all. God is pushed to the back and sin, in one form or another, fills in the gap as we make our faith in Christ moderately important in our life, and that cannot be. The author C. S. Lewis once said, *“Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”*

Dear friends, you and I, we were buried with Christ. Dead to sin, alive in Christ

Jesus. God comes to us daily through word and sacrament, to remind us in these passionate terms that our faith is a matter of utmost importance. Marvel at the daily significance of your baptism, how God came to you so personally to bring you to himself. Consider the grace of God in that through his gift of baptism that God drowns that sinful nature in you and daily raises up in you a new person to live for him. He washed and cleansed you and made you new; through water connected to his powerful word. Through the ongoing power of baptism, through his holy Word, through his sacred supper, he holds you so close, your God connects you so intimately and personally with the blessings of Christ's work and that changes how you and I live each and every day of our lives. That gives us renewed focus in our struggle against sin and in our new life in Christ. That good news refreshes and renews until Jesus takes us home to eternal life.

And we are reminded of that connection of utmost importance, every time we walk into church and set our eyes on the font. We are reminded of that connection of utmost importance whenever witness a baptism, as a precious soul is graciously brought into God's family through water and the word. Whenever we start a worship service, or start a prayer, or start or end our day, *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*, we can recall these blessings that God in his grace pours out on his children. Our baptism reminds us that we are his chosen people, called to be his own. Washed and saved by his grace, brought into his family, made heirs of eternal life, we are also purified and sanctified and set apart by God to give him glory in our lives. We are dead to sin. We are alive in Christ Jesus. This is the basic truth of our faith that refreshes us and renews us today: buried! We were buried with Christ through baptism. May God bring this significant truth to the forefront of our lives on a daily basis as we live for our gracious God. A reading from Romans chapter 6.

Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Amen.