

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ"

Scripture: Romans 6:1-11, Psalm 84,

Hymns: Come thou fount of every blessing, Lord, I want to be a Christian 571,

Blessed Assurance 687, [at river: Shall we gather at the River, The Lord bless you

619] Open the eyes of my heart, I desire Jesus, Mighty to save

September 24

Rev. Steve Filyk

As I was preparing to speak on today's passage

I ran across a story from the home-life

Of one of those commentator's .

A story that highlights what is at stake

In Paul's words:

That commentator noted:

"When my son was in preschool,

he accidentally spilled an entire carton of milk on the floor.

He was devastated by his mistake.

So as I mopped the floor,

I reassured him that everything was going to be just fine.

I said, "Look! Now the whole floor is nice and clean!"

He turned to me and said brightly,

"Hey! Maybe I should spill on the floor more often!"ⁱ

A cute story most of us can identify with

A cute story that help us learn a little more about sin and grace

And how easily grace can be misinterpreted.

We all spill milk on the floor.

We all make unintentional mistakes and errors.

And we all deliberately sin.

We indulge in gossip

though it damages the reputation of friends.

We feed fantasies

Though they undermine our intimate relationships.

We adopt the lifestyles of those around us

And end up forgetting who we are and whose we are.

We end up forgetting the Lord.

We all sin.

We all spill milk on the floor.

And we all have had someone mop things up for us.

People who have helped us deal with the consequences.

A God who graciously forgives our sin

And welcomes us back into the fold.

We all spill milk on the floor.

And we know what it is like to have someone clean things up for us.

But like the child who dropped the jug of 2%,

We don't always respond in a way that is fitting.

Instead of wanting to avoid that situation,

We think about repeating it.

In today's epistle lesson

Paul speaks about the interplay of sin and grace

In the lives of those united to Christ.

Paul asks the rhetorical question in verse 1:

"Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"

That is if we keep on sinning, more grace will be shown.

Taking it a step further

Won't that just make God look more gracious?ⁱⁱ

Paul asks again in verse 15 (which follows today's reading):

"Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?"

If we have been freed from the law's condemnation,

Why should it matter if we sin?

Paul's answer to both questions is pretty clear:

“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?...

“Shall we sin because we are not under the law
but under grace?”

“By no means!”ⁱⁱⁱ

By no means!

And he takes the time to help us understand why.

Paul reminds us that we are united to Christ.

And that because of this union,
we share in his death and his resurrection.

Jesus' death is our death.

Our bodies which have been enslaved to sin
Are done away with in that death.

Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection.

We are given new lives
That are free from the old slavery
And designed for devotion to righteousness.

To help us understand this more clearly

Paul draws on the image of baptism, baptism by immersion.
Not what you saw last Sunday with Abel,
But what you will see this later today with Kerri.

Last Sunday water the water that was sprinkled

Conveyed imagery of refreshment and renewal
And cleansing.

Largely these are symbols of life.

But this Sunday the water also conveys imagery of judgement:

The submerging of the world during the flood,
The drowning of Pharaoh's army during the Exodus,
The crucifixion and burial of Christ.

As Kerri will be dipped backwards into the water

There is imagery of judgement and death.

The life that is enslaved to sin, dies.

We are, as Paul says, “dead to sin.”^{iv}

But baptism by immersion also showcases resurrection.

The person who is dipped is also raised back up.

Noah and his family were preserved.

The people of Israel walked through the waters on dry land.

Christ was raised from the dead.

Baptism reveals how we participated in Christ's resurrection.

Baptism shows that, in Paul's words,
are “alive to God in Jesus Christ.”^v

Does that mean we fully and completely

Renounce our former ways of sin?

Kerri will make this vow...

The truth is that we will continue to be tempted.

And we will continue to stumble.

Our worship always begins with a prayer of confession,

An acknowledgement that we struggle to live in God's ways.

And yet in our union with Christ

We have fundamentally changed.

Our life has the shape and trajectory of Christ's life.

As Paul says in his letter to the church at Corinth:

“if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:

The old has gone, the new is here!”^{vi}

The challenge is to grow up into that new identity

Instead of slinking back into old habits.

We are to think differently about ourselves:

To “count yourselves dead to sin
but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”^{vii}

This changed thinking
 Translates into transformed behavior.

Paul further admonishes us,
 (I am using Peterson's version *The Message*)

"[Don't] give sin a vote in the way you conduct your lives.
 Don't give it the time of day.
 Don't even run little errands
 that are connected with that old way of life.

Throw yourselves wholeheartedly and full-time...
 into God's way of doing things.
 Sin can't tell you how to live.

After all, you're not living under that old tyranny any longer.
 You're living in the freedom of God.^{viii}

This is a sort of 'fake it till you make it',
 Better yet an 'identity informs behavior'
 Approach to our new life in Jesus.

And involves both an understanding of our true identity
 And our intentionality in remembering it.

Martin Luther is known to have understood baptism
 "as a daily event,
 a cleansing and renewal of forgiveness that we need,
 and is ours, every day.

In other words, baptism is not something once done, now finished,
 but once done, now lived in."^{ix}

At Kerri's baptism you are graciously invited
 To reflect on your own baptism.
 To reconsider all God has done for you
 And how you will respond to that love.

But what about those who are still wondering
 Whether grace offers a sort of 'loophole'?
 Whether the forgiveness provides an opportunity
 To enjoy more sin?

Maybe a helpful way of responding to those children and adults
 Who wondering whether they should spill milk more often
 Is to consider an illustration
 from preacher James Montgomery Boice.

An illustration that is given in three question:

"First, can an adult become a child again?
 Clearly, the answer is no.
 No one can reverse the aging process.

Second, can an adult act childish?
 We know the answer to that, because we see it often.
 Of course, adults often act like children.

But now, here is the third critical question:
 What do you say to an adult who is acting childish? ...

[You say,] "For heaven's sake, just grow up!"
 That is exactly what Paul is saying to believers [he adds].

"You are Christians now...
 You can not go back to being what you were before...
 So for heaven's sake, grow up and start acting like Christians"^x

Well may we all recognize the grace we have been shown.
 And may we start living in it.

“Now to him who is able to keep you from falling,
and to make you stand without blemish
in the presence of his glory with rejoicing,

to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, power, and authority,
before all time and now and forever. Amen.”^{xi}

ⁱ Shawnthea Monroe “Romans 6:1b-11; Pastoral Perspective” *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16)*.

ⁱⁱ Romans 3:8

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 6:2,15 NIV

^{iv} Romans 6:11 NIV

^v Romans 6:11 NIV

^{vi} 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

^{vii} Romans 6:11 NIV

^{viii} Romans 6:12-14 MSG

^{ix} Karl Jacobson “Commentary on Psalm 84; Romans 6:1-11”

www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3289

^x James Montgomery Boice *Whatever happened to the Gospel of Grace?* 80,81

^{xi} Jude 1:24 NRSV