

“Dying and Rising With Christ”

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Luke 4:14-21

Romans 6:1-11

*Have you heard the phrase “Dying and Rising with Christ?” What does it mean? Dying and rising with Christ is the very essence of Christianity. It is the *hub* of our faith and it is the heart of the *heart* of the Christian life. To understand what it means to live the Christian life we must have an understanding of “*dying and rising with Christ.*”*

We begin in our quest for understanding with our Presbyterian Book of Order: ***“In Baptism, we participate in Jesus’ death and resurrection. In Baptism, we die to what separates us from God and are raised to newness of life in Christ.”***

--W-2:3002

Now let’s move to the Bible and hear what Paul teaches about dying and rising with Christ in Romans 6:3-11.....

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. ⁵For 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.

Paul teaches that ***“all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.”*** Now I dare say that most of us didn’t think of death when we baptized *Ava Ann, Eleanor Lynn, and William Ernest Schilling* this morning. However, the sacrament of baptism is a visible teaching of dying with Jesus Christ. It’s a symbolic picture of being ***“buried with him by baptism into death.”*** *But what is buried....what is taken to the grave with Christ? “We 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. For whoever has died is freed from sin.”* When we teach that we die with Christ, it is our rebellious, godless, sinful, dysfunctional self that is crucified and buried with Christ so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin. Now that is good news!

The first question that is asked of those being baptized or of the spiritual guardians of infants who are being baptized is, ***“Do you renounce sin and the power of evil in your life and in the world?”*** The baptismal vows begin with a renunciation....a confirmation that we desire to let go of sin, evil or anything else that would prevent the baptized from embracing the new life in Christ. In baptism we affirm that it is *only in Christ* that ***“we might no longer be enslaved to sin.”***

Baptism symbolizes our sinful self dying with Christ but baptism does not guarantee it. It happens as *Ava Ann, Eleanor and William* and all of us who have been baptized appropriate Christ’s death through faith. We trust that *Ava Ann, Ellie and William* will come to the point in their lives when they will *confirm* the baptismal vows taken on their behalf this day. We trust they will do so because of the love, nurture, teaching and blessing of the faith community and, most importantly, because God’s Holy Spirit won’t let them go. God’s Spirit will continue to touch them with grace, hope and love, so that their hearts will turn toward God in faith. However, when they choose to receive Christ by faith and, thereby, appropriate Christ’s death for themselves their journey of faith is just beginning. For all of us who call ourselves Christians we are on a life-long journey that will include a series of relinquishments of all that detracts and keeps us from embracing the new life of Christ. These relinquishments can be as simple as a breath prayer, ***“Lord, forgive me. Please take this burden from me. Come Holy Spirit.”*** Or it can be as profound as a mountain top experience of grace to which you return over and over as an anchor of your relationship with God.

The Church's high calling is to offer opportunities for Christ's followers to die and rise with him. On several occasions I have participated in a special worship service that was designed to help us visualize our dying with Christ and being set free from anything that thwarts new life. A large cross was positioned horizontally on the floor of the sanctuary's chancel area, worshippers were given sticky notes and invited to record our pain, failures, personal sins, the world's pain...anything that, in our minds, prevented us or the world from being what God desired for us. We were then invited to bring these notes to the cross and leave them stuck to the cross. I found this worship experience incredibly helpful in visualizing my sin and sorrow being crucified and buried with Christ. Dying with Christ is based on the belief that Jesus' death and burial was not just about him but, in the mystery of atonement, it included you and me. ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”*** (I Peter 2:24)

But our dying with Christ....leaving our brokenness in the tomb.....is only half the good news. As Paul writes,

⁴***Therefore 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.***

God wants us to walk in newness of life.....to live as if we have been resurrected from the dead. Again, this is accomplished not by our good intentions, good works or initiative but as we are ***“united with him in a resurrection like his.”***

The second century theologian, *Irenaeus*, stated that ***“The glory of God is a person fully alive.”*** As followers of Christ we really ought to be the most joyful, welcoming, risk taking, fully alive people around because we are ***“united with Jesus in a resurrection like his.”*** It's all about Christ and what he has done for us!

Think about the *resurrection life*....we are loved even when we fail....we are forgiven....we are being set free from our sins.....our salvation does not depend upon our goodness.....there is nothing we can say, do or think that will ever separate us from God's love....we are given gifts to be used for the well-being of others....we are given the fruit of God's Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...Galatians 5:22)....we are baptized into a supportive community of love and nurture.....we are promised a new body and a new home when we die.....and, most importantly, Jesus has promised to live in us...so that *we too might walk in newness of life*.

That's why Jesus came.....not only to show us a more perfect way but to be that perfect way for us. Our Gospel reading makes it clear that Jesus came that we might walk in newness of life....Luke 4: 14-21:

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. ¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus reads the great liberation passage from Isaiah 61 and boldly declares that what Isaiah promised six hundred years before has been fulfilled today! Jesus knew that God had sent him to fulfill Isaiah's message of hope and transformation. This was his commission....his mantle for ministry. He had come to bring life to the literal poor, imprisoned, blind and oppressed and also to those who are spiritually and emotionally poor, imprisoned, blind and oppressed.

Jesus came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor which is a reference to the "Year of Jubilee" found in Leviticus 25. The "Year of Jubilee" was to happen every fifty years. In that "Year of Jubilee" all debts were to be forgiven, property was to be restored and it was to be a new beginning for everyone. This is what Jesus came to fulfill. We receive the "Year of Jubilee" every day by dying and rising with Christ. That is the movement of the gospel...first allowing Jesus to take our baggage to the grave and then receiving from Jesus the new resurrection life he has promised. This is symbolized in the sacrament of baptism but it is appropriated by faith as we choose to journey each day with the One who brings life to us.

This is our hope for *Ava Ann, Ellie Lynn and William Ernest* and for all who have died and been raised with Christ through faith.

Closing prayer written by J. Philip Newell:

*In the busyness of this day
Grant me a stillness of seeing, O God.
In the conflicting voices of my heart
Grant me a calmness of hearing.
Let my seeing and hearing
My words and my actions
Be rooted in a silent certainty of your presence.
Let my passions for life
And the longings for justice that stir within me
Be grounded in the experience of your stillness.
Let my life be rooted in the ground of your peace, O God,
Let me be rooted in the depths of your peace.*

[From Celtic Benediction by J Philip Newell]

Amen