

“Baptismal Connections”
Romans 6:1-11

January 8, 2017

The Baptism of Our Lord

We live in a very “connected” society. In fact, we may live in the most connected society there ever was. Due largely to the magic of the Internet, we can be connected to anyone in the world almost instantaneously. And we love that connection. You see people with their faces buried in screens of various sizes all the time. Whether it’s an iPod, an iPad, or a smart phone, we just love being connected.

What happens when that connection is broken? What happens when the Internet service provider goes down or the router doesn’t work? (Usually, the problem is not with your device.) Many people go crazy and become quite desperate. We don’t want to be disconnected – ever.

We have a natural need to be connected. God made us that way. He created us to live connected to Him and to one another. That is what Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden of Eden. They were perfectly connected to God. They were perfectly connected to each other. Everything was good: perfect satisfaction, perfect happiness, perfect peace, and perfect love. There was nothing that was bad: no conflict, no pain, no suffering, and no death. This was a picture of Paradise.

Something obviously has changed. This is not the world we live in now. In this world, there is only imperfect satisfaction, partial happiness, occasional peace, and limited love. There is plenty of conflict, pain, suffering, and death or all of us. What changed? It was not God, the source and power of our connectedness, who had changed. To go back to our technology illustration, the Internet service provider did not go down nor was there a problem with the router. The fault is not with God.

The problem is with the device. The problem is humanity. The problem is us. Adam and Eve changed and set the tone for all of their descendants, including us. It was their disobedience to the will of God which disconnected humanity from God in the first place and brought sin into the world. It is our sin which keeps each of us from being connected to God here and now. Simply put, sin separates us from God. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” (Isaiah 59:1-2)

“Sin” is more than doing bad things or failing to do good things. Oh, that it was that easy. Sin is an evil condition which has infected the world and all who live in it like a horrible and fatal disease. Just prior to our text from Romans, St. Paul describes the horror of this disease. He says that sin came into the world because of one man, but it spread to all people. Thus, all people are infected with sin, whether they know it or not. Sin results in death and condemnation for all people, even though they may try to hide from death and deny God’s condemnation. You and I are all infected with this disease and, by it, we earn death here on earth now and condemnation in hell forever. This is what it means to be disconnected from God.

Our only hope is to be connected to God, the source of all good, once again. That’s what St. Paul is talking about in our text for today. The way to be reconnected is through Holy Baptism. Baptism reconnects us to God through His Son, Jesus Christ. How does this happen?

First, as sinners, we are powerless to connect ourselves to God. We need to be reconnected by somebody else. Every use of the word, “baptize”, in our text is in the passive voice. That means somebody else is doing the action. In other words, you don’t baptize yourself. Someone else baptizes you. Although a human agent is involved in applying the water, it is really God who is performing the baptism.

Secondly, St. Paul says that we are baptized “into Christ Jesus”. This means that, when you are baptized, you are connected to Christ Jesus in a very real way. And, St. Paul goes on to say, when you are connected to Christ Jesus, you are connected to three very important aspects of Christ Jesus.

When you are baptized into Christ Jesus, you are connected to His death. Jesus endured death, not for anything He had done, but for the sin of all people. In baptism, you are connected to that death. His death becomes your death. The punishment He endured for sin becomes the punishment for your sin. The forgiveness for sin that He earned there becomes the forgiveness for your sin.

When you are baptized into Christ Jesus, you are also connected to His burial. You and your sin are buried with Him. As Christ Jesus left behind the sin and death of the world in the tomb to be buried forever, so also your sin and death have been buried with Christ, never to bother you again.

When you are baptized into Christ Jesus, you are finally and most importantly connected to His resurrection. As Christ was raised from the dead to new life, through baptism, we are able to walk in newness of life now. And we have the great hope and promise that, through baptism, we are united with Him in a resurrection like His – a resurrection to life in heaven with Him forever.

How can simple baptism do all these wonderful things – connecting us to Christ and all of His blessings? Baptism connects us to Christ because Christ connected Himself to baptism. That's why our Lord's baptism is so important and why we remember it this day. It seems odd that our holy Lord would seek baptism from John the Baptist. John thought it was odd, too. But Jesus said, "let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus was not getting baptized for Himself, but for us. He was connecting Himself to baptism so that, from now on, baptism would connect us to Him.

Now, we are connected to His experiences and the benefits of His work. Jesus Christ died. In baptism, we have died, too. Our old self was crucified with Him. Dead people can no longer be condemned by sin or enslaved to sin. In the same way, you and I are no longer condemned by our sin. It has been forgiven and taken away. Sin has lost its power to control us. Its power has been brought to nothing by Jesus' death on the cross so that we are no longer enslaved to sin.

Jesus Christ was buried in a tomb. In baptism, we were buried with Him also. Our old sinful selves were put in the tomb. When something is put in a tomb or a grave, that is where it stays. All of your sins – the wrong that you have done and the good that you have failed to do – are dead and buried in the tomb. That is where they will stay, never to bother you or condemn you again.

Jesus Christ was raised from death to life, never to die or be buried ever again. In baptism, we were raised from the death of sin to new life with Him. Often, we talk about eternal life as if it is something which has not yet occurred, but will happen in the distant future. The new life which baptism gives has already begun. We no longer live under the control of sin, but we walk in newness of life in the kingdom of God. This is not a life curtailed by death, but a life which transcends death. As our souls have been raised from spiritual death to new spiritual life through baptism, so also shall our bodies be raised from physical death to everlasting life in heaven.

What does that mean for us until that time? Does it impact how we live? Or, as St. Paul asks, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" St. Paul answers his own question, "By no means!" As I said before, we no longer live under the reign of sin, but under the reign of God. We have been called out of the darkness of sin, death, and hell, into His marvelous light of holiness, life, and heaven. Our lives now are to reflect that new state of being, as we joyfully love and serve our God by loving and serving our neighbor.

Why would we even want to return to the old way? Imagine dying, having your body put in a coffin, and being buried in Highland Cemetery. Then, imagine a great miracle: you are resurrected from the dead, leave the cemetery, and return to Great Falls. Can you ever imagine making that long and lonely walk back to the cemetery, climbing into your coffin, and being buried again? No, that would be ridiculous. Once you are raised to new life, you want to live that life to the fullest and never return to death again.

In the same way, in baptism, we have been resurrected to new life in the kingdom of God. Why would we ever want to return to the kingdom of sin and death? We want to live that new life to the fullest in obedience to God and in love for one another. So, instead of returning to sin and death, we return to our baptism on a regular basis. We see the baptismal font, front and center in church, as a constant visual reminder of our baptism. We begin Divine Service by hearing the words spoken over us in our baptism: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We conclude Divine Service by seeing the sign made over us in our baptism – the sign of the cross. All of these things help us remember that we are living a new life in a new kingdom for a new purpose through baptism.

In this world which emphasizes being connected, you and I are better connected than anyone else in the world. Through baptism, we are connected to Jesus Christ. We are connected to His death for the forgiveness of our sin. We are connected to His burial for the removal of our sin. We are connected to His resurrection or a new and glorious life which exists already on earth and which will continue forever in heaven. You can't be any more connected than this. Amen.