

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
June 24, 2007

Baptized into Christ

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for our sermon today is from the Epistle, which was read earlier.

Have you ever tried to imagine what it would be like to live in a world without the many problems that affect us everyday? We find it difficult, if not, impossible, to even begin to imagine such a condition. We have lived on this earth, with all of its greed, selfishness, strife, war, poverty, and discrimination for so long, it is beyond realism to think of life without them.

This kind of utopian existence is exactly what is indicated in Scripture as it tells about creation and life on earth before the Fall into sin. Imagine a wholesome innocence in the relationship between a man and a woman. Imagine employers and employees without dispute and in agreement. Try to imagine the relationship of man and wild animals without fear and struggle. What would it be like to have ideal weather without destructive storms, earthquakes and the like? Above all, we find it impossible to image a relationship between God and man that has no barriers, no rebellion, but in its place, a continuous, natural, loving relationship in a genuine fellowship where all is shared and nothing is hidden. This open, unhindered relationship between God and man is the one we know the least about in this world of today.

That's where Paul begins our text for today. *"Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed."* This relationship between God and man which once existed in a paradise, is no more. It was

fun while it lasted. Try as we might, that relationship can not be repaired. Because of that fact, we lived under the Law, imprisoned. The Law which we had was the Law of God. The Law provided for us. The Law provided for us a way to restore the relationship which once existed between God and man, the relationship which we know little about. The Law promised us a Savior, a Substitute who would die in our place. The Law has promised us Christ.

We are now, as St. Paul writes, “*all sons of God, through faith [in Christ Jesus].*” Not only are we all sons of God, we “*are all one in Christ Jesus.*” But as we all know, that isn’t necessarily true.

Tomorrow we remember a day in the Reformation which defines more than anything what Lutherans are: the presentation of the Augsburg Confession. The Augsburg Confession is the document that first officially laid out what Lutherans believe, what it means to be Lutheran. The Augsburg Confession was not about breaking away from the Catholic Church or breaking up the Church at all. Instead, it was meant to show that we are all under Christ. In the preface to the Confession, the Lutherans wrote this: “We...are prepared to discuss...all possible ways and means by which we may come together.... In this way, dissensions may be put away without offensive conflict. This can be done honorably, with God’s help, so that we may be brought back to agreement and concord. As your edict shows, *we are all under one Christ.*”

The Lutherans boldly and clearly stated what they believed so that there could be a basis for real agreement around the truth. They didn’t want to split the Church; they wanted to unite it – unite it in the one truth of God’s Word, unite it in the one Christ.

Obviously, if you look around, you'll know that we are not all one in Christ. The Christian Church is very fragmented; we can see that in all the denominations around the world. But St. Paul tells us that all Christians are indeed one in Christ Jesus. *"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**"* How can that be, that with so many denominations, we are all one in Christ Jesus?

We need to understand who it was that Paul was talking to. Paul's audience consisted of two groups of people. The one was the predominantly Gentile Christians in this province of Galatia. They had heard, received, believed and continued to live in the Gospel Jesus had revealed to Paul and which Paul had shared with them. This is the message of justification by faith in Christ Jesus alone. The other group was the Judaizers, Jewish Christians who were teaching that even the Christian must follow certain Jewish customs in order to be a real Christian. One was very much a follower of the Law while one was very much the follower of the Gospel. Because of their differences, they were not of one mind.

Even our guts tell us that we're not one. Have you noticed that before? Doesn't something inside tell you you aren't even all one with yourself? Are you always of one mind – in your own mind? Are you always undivided in your devotion to the Lord? Don't you sometimes do things you know you shouldn't, things you really don't want to do? Don't you struggle with temptation? Your conscience says "No" but your body says "Yes." What does it mean to say we're all one in Christ Jesus when we're not even one with ourselves?

The reason for our internal conflict is sin. Inside every Christian is a war going on: a war between believer and unbeliever. We're sinner and saint at the same time. The good we want to do, we don't do. The bad we don't want to do, that's what we do. As long as we're sinful and as long as we're Christians, the struggle won't go away.

Because of Christ, our sins have been forgiven. Are sins were forgiven us at our baptism. That is what Paul makes abundantly clear. "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" He is here speaking to people who have been baptized already—baptized not into Moses or themselves or the law or an organization. They were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, baptized into the Christian faith with Christ as its center, baptized with water and the word by the Holy Spirit in their spirit. Paul reminds them of this one baptism but also further describes one of its blessings. When we are baptized, we are clothed with Christ; we wear him; we have been covered with him; we put on Christ like a garment of salvation and sonship.

When we make our first appearance into the world, we are naked. We are in the flesh. We wear the clothing Adam has passed down to us: sin and death. It is an old man that is thoroughly corrupt, a slave of the devil and manifested in ignorance, blindness, contempt and even a hatred of God. It is woven into a covering of evil thoughts, words and works.

But in baptism we get a new set of clothes as we put on Christ. This can be understood in two ways: according to the Law and according to the Gospel. According to the Law we put on Christ through imitating his example. We imitate Jesus' patience, gentleness, love, moderation, self-control and all other of his noble virtues. However

good this imitation may be, it still does not change our original “underwear” of sin, death and the devil’s power over us.

To put on Christ according to the Gospel is not a matter of imitation but of a new birth and a new creation. This does not happen by a change of clothing or appearance or behavior. It happens by the rebirth and renewal that takes place at our baptism. This is the gracious clothing to which Paul refers—noted best by the double reference to Christ.

This past week during our Vacation Bible School, the children heard the story of Philip and the Ethiopian man. The Ethiopian man desired to be baptized. When Philip baptized him, he rejoiced greatly. I asked the children what it means to be baptized. It means that Christ comes to us and says that we now belong to Him. Christ will be with us forever. Christ will provide for us all the days of our lives. If that isn’t good enough, Christ sweetens the deal: He tells us that He is going to prepare a place for us, that where He is, we may be also.

We can never be one with sin, and we’re all sinful. God has seen to it that all Christians are also separated from sin. By sinning, we made ourselves one with sin. But God has seen to it that it didn’t stay that way. He’s driven a wedge between us and evil, the wedge of the cross. And the deeper that wedge of the cross penetrates, the further we are pushed from sin.

In our baptism, the break was made clean. In Baptism, we died to sin. By Jesus’ cross, given to us personally in Holy Baptism, we are forgiven of all our sins. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.