

In and With Christ
Romans 6:1-11
June 22, 2014
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church
Clemson, SC

Their names were Annie and Gloria. They were certain of their baptism in Christ and alive in glorifying God. They entertained family and friends at their big round kitchen table. To eat with this modern day Mary and Martha gave one the feeling that Jesus was present at the table too. The kitchen was always full of life, nourishing food was prepared, grace was said, and everything was shared with the many who were present at the table.

After the meal I was given a stool to stand on and help wash the dishes. I thought that the dirtier they were the better, for it meant I got to play in the water of the double sink even more. When the bubbles would overflow onto the counter and floor, I was gently reminded not to fall. Still the flowing water would rinse every plate and glass spotless.

Just when Annie and Gloria were finished with one meal, they began another. This time it was to take comfort food to a family that was grieving the death of a loved one. Like the women who were first at the tomb, Annie and Gloria took their spiced food and were first at the home of those who mourned. They walked in faith.

There's an old spiritual that you may know goes like this,

Wade in the water

Wade in the water, children

Wade in the water

God's gonna trouble the water.¹

This song was sung about OT and NT stories—The Exodus of Israelites escaping from Pharaoh (Ex 14) and from NT the healing from disease—made whole after the angel stirred the water (John 5:4). One is a drowning, the other is a cleansing. Both are images of what happens in baptism.

With children we speak of baptism as a cleansing—washing away our dirt, making us clean, removing the blemishes of our sins. As we grow and learn more about the faith, baptism as drowning takes on meaning for us as well. Paul tells us about dying to Sin,

so that we are no longer held captive to its reign in our lives. He also proclaims of how grace is far more plentiful than sin. And that God is generous beyond our imagination.

Recently I watched a drowning simulator on the internet.² It is from the perspective of one who gets thrown overboard without a life jacket. There's the immediate gasping for air and the weight of the water pushing down on your chest so that you go deeper into the darkness. The light at the surface gets smaller. If you are skilled and can scroll fast enough you might come back up for air at least once. I did the first time I tried it, but not any of the other times. I never saw the light of day again. Every time I drowned I saw my life slipping from me. The first time it said I died after 19 minutes. The second time after 4. Every time after that it was zero. I thought it rather ironic that the first time I was scrolling madly I accidentally opened my a worship file titled "*Easter Morning Prayer*" and another one titled "*Prayer of Confession*." How appropriate at my simulated dying.

And it is. Baptism is a simulated dying that ***unites us in Christ*** by his dying in our place for us for all time, past, present, future. Paul describes what being dominated by sin does to us. It is impossible to grow and live if sin reigns in our lives. When we enact baptism in Christ, it is symbolic of having drowned in our self-centered sin (our past life) as if we were buried *with Christ*. In his dying for us Christ put an end to death-as-the-end. Christ died to Sin for us. But that is not all God does for us in baptism. Because we ***were buried with Christ***, we ***will also rise with Christ*** (our future resurrection).

These two little words "*in*" and "*with*" are prepositions. They describe relationships defining time, place, locations, and descriptions in relation to a noun or pronoun. In other words, these little words are of vital importance in the sacraments.

"*In*" describes a state of being at rest, such as ***being in Christ***. The place where Christ holds us is within his human nature. So God has us wrapped in the love of the Trinity because of Jesus' dying to our sin for us.

A variation of "*in*" is "into" which *indicates action or motion* into the heart of Christ. This idea of moving into Christ is present in the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

God is the primary actor in both sacraments and invites us to share in or participate with Christ in his dying and rising. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments because they were instituted by Christ and engage us in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. This is why we believe that the sacraments are the enacted Word or the sealed Word of God because they show forth Christ's saving death and risen life with the promise of eternal life. No other rituals do this, only Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments.

In baptism the old life in sin has gone and the new life in Christ has begun. We are made new or ***justified in Christ***—it is just as if I had never sinned. God’s grace is sufficient for the past sins and any sins yet to come, for Christ died to sin once and for all. **Christ makes it possible for sin to no longer rule our lives.** Paul does not say that suffering, temptation, and trials will not exist, but that in the new life *with Christ* we are free to choose not to sin.

Before we were in Christ it was ***impossible*** not to sin because Sin ruled our lives. Now in and with Christ it is ***possible*** to live for God’s glory. And so we are given ***responsibility to choose to live in freedom as we live in and with Christ.*** We understand this to be good news/bad news theology. The good news is “You are saved.” The bad news is “Now you need to live like it.”

“With” is my favorite little word in the sacramental liturgy for it indicates togetherness, community, being connected with Christ, united with Christ. And we all know that Emmanuel means “God with us.” The word Paul uses in this text to describe how we are ***planted with Christ*** in order to grow together with Christ (in our present life).

In our yard we have a weeping cherry tree. Not only is it weeping, it is dying or appears to be. Some disease has gotten into it and so it is withering from within. In order to try and save this tree, it needs to be purged of this disease within. So I have drowned its roots in and with a bath of nourishing waters.

We are the same way. We will wither and die with the disease of sin, but when we, in baptism, are drowned to sin and planted with Christ, we will grow in the righteousness of Christ to God’s glory.

Perhaps the best way that I understand baptism as dying and rising *with Christ* is through my mother’s death last year. Not only are the sacraments the Word enacted, they are also ongoing reminders of God’s love for us. By this I mean, we may not realize the power of baptism until we are like those that Annie and Gloria visited. When we are face to face with death it is the sacraments that can comfort us and draw us into living to God.

Her name is Evelyn, child of God. I only knew her through my mother’s conversations. I knew they had been friends since before I was born. Evelyn was one of the few who exchanged letters with my mother on a regular basis. Their lives were close, but I did not know how close until the phone rang. It was Evelyn and she had never called me before. She said she got my number from my mother years ago. Evelyn he did not know why she did that until now. She had not been able to reach mother by phone in several days. She wanted to know if my mother was okay. I told Evelyn that mother was dying, that she probably would not make it through the night. She told me that she knew something was wrong because they had always been there for each other. I asked her how long she had known my mother and she said, “Our whole lives. We

were baptized together 90 years ago.” I began to cry. Who does that? Only a baptism buddy. Now that my friends is how to live to God, and die and rise with with Christ. When we die in Christ, our baptism is made complete, whole, certain. For this is the reality of the promise of eternal life that is given to us in the sacraments. **In and with Christ we are given the power to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

Let us live this Good News.

¹ “Wade In the Water,” spiritual lyrics from http://www.negrospirituals.com/news-song/wade_in_the_water.htm accessed June 21, 2014.

² <http://sortieenmer.com/?lang=en> A Trip Out to Sea by Guy Cotten promoting wearing a life jacket. Accessed June 21, 2014.