

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

21st June 2020, Third Sunday after Pentecost

ROMANS 6:1-11

SINS FORGIVEN, A NEW LIFE WORTH LIVIN'

As humans, we are very good at justifying and giving excuses for the wrong things we do. Would you agree? If you have a quick think about ways that we do this you might come up with how we sometimes blame others, blame the situation we were in, perhaps say we didn't really know it was wrong but we do now and we are sorry about it. And the list will go on. Now having the opportunity to watch grandchildren grow and develop I see how early on we humans learn this skill of justifying and excusing what we do. And, we probably shouldn't be surprised at that because it is a part of who we are: if we go back to very first sin of Adam and Eve, when God caught them out what did they do? Adam didn't just blame Eve, he blamed God; 'Lord, it was the woman you put here with me'. Eve in turn blamed the snake, and the snake of course didn't have a leg to stand on. Justifying and excusing our wrong doings, our sins, is something we are born with, and something we develop throughout our lives.

One of the big ways we do this is to say, 'Well, that's just the way I am'. Have you heard that one before? Have you used it, even if not out loud perhaps to justify your words and actions to yourself? If someone is being pulled up by another person, or even feel they have to justify to themselves, about the way they have spoken bluntly or insensitively to someone else, or overreacted to a situation, or put their own desires ahead of the needs of others, they may justify this by saying, 'Well, that's just the way I am', with the inference of course that there is nothing they can or will do to change that. I will tell you here that this is an excuse I find quite frustrating from others. But I will tell you also, that it's one I find myself using all too often, either aloud or to justify things to myself.

"Well, that's just the way I am'. As an excuse for the things we do wrong, and to try and justify not changing ourselves, Paul not only debunks this but turns it right back at us. Here in Romans chapter 6 he first of all writes, 'Should we keep on sinning, so that God's wonderful kindness

will show up even better? ²No, we should not! If we are dead to sin, how can we go on sinning?’ (v. *Ib,2 CEV*) If we are dead to sin, how can we go on sinning? Good question, but how can he make the claim that we are dead to sin? Well, he goes on with that; ³‘Don’t you know that all who share in Christ Jesus by being baptized also share in his death?’ ⁴‘When we were baptized, we died and were buried with Christ. We were baptized, so that we would live a new life, as Christ was raised to life by the glory of God the Father.’ (v. *3-4 CEV*)

By the power of our Baptism, which is not our power but God’s, we died with Jesus to our sin, its power and its consequences. Through Jesus our sin was buried to show how final this death is. And then, by the same power of God through our baptism, we were raised to new life with Jesus. As he often does, in this reading here Paul goes over and over making that same point: Through our baptism we are joined to Jesus. This means that we died to sin with Him. Also, just as Jesus was raised to new life, we have been raised to this new life also.

So, what does this mean for us in our lives, here and now? The end of this reading puts this very plainly; ‘You must think of yourselves as dead to the power of sin. But Christ Jesus has given life to you, and you live for God.’ (v. *11 CEV*) Through our baptism we are joined to all that Jesus has done for us. Because of the new life we now have through Jesus we have been set free from sin and its power over us, and in all we do we now live for God.

Cool! Just reading it like that it sounds so easy for us, doesn’t it? Something I worry about in doing these video addresses is that while you mightn’t walk out of church if I say something you don’t like, you can easily switch off the screen. So please, bear with me here. We are told here, very plainly, that we are now dead to sin, and that as new creations of God how can sin be a part of us? But we know our sinful desires are still there, and we often fall to them. We know that the temptations to follow our own way instead of God’s are still there, and we often follow them. We know that we still feel the pull of our pride, our anger, our selfishness, our impatience, our hate, our prejudice, our resentment, and we still sometimes allow ourselves to submit to their pull. We know that the devil is working just as hard to now take us away from God as He worked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and with Jesus in the desert.

The pull of sin is still there, very strongly, both within and without us. If we deny its existence, or try to downplay its power over us, perhaps that just makes us more likely to fall to it.

While sin is still with us, and even in our lives, its consequences have been defeated. Words we use in our funeral service, at the time of burial, are; ‘Death has lost the battle! Where is its victory? Where is its sting?’ Sin is what gives death its sting, and the Law is the power behind sin. But thank God for letting our Lord Jesus Christ give us the victory!’ This all-encompassing, complete, forgiveness which is now ours we have through Jesus’ victory, which frees us from sin and its consequences; separation from God and eternal death. It doesn’t enable or excuse our sin, that’s made very plain at the start of this reading which I read earlier, but it defeats sin and its consequences. And because we now have strength and hope in God’s forgiveness, it helps us to defeat sin in our lives now also. This sin, this rebellion against God, is no longer a part of who we are as people who have become God’s children as we are joined to Jesus in our baptism.

Again, we still sin, so now what? We are forgiven and set free, that relies on us in no way at all, so live like it. Live as who we are. When it comes to sin, don’t just make an excuse, make an effort. I like that, so I will say it again: don’t just make an excuse, make an effort. Don’t just let the temptations from outside pull us their way without trying to fight them. Don’t just blame how we are, how we feel, what we are going through, what others have done, as an excuse for something we know we have done wrong. Ask God for help and strength, remember His forgiveness for when we do slip up, and be prepared to make an effort ourselves to live as the person our baptism into Jesus’ death and resurrection has made us to be.

Sin forgiven, a new life worth livin’. We are, through Jesus, a new people. Live like it, in God’s power and forgiveness. Hold on to the forgiveness and the guarantee of His grace which we have been given in our baptism. Ask God to help us each day to die to sin, and to live the new life we have been given with Him. Amen.

Prayer: Lord God, we thank you that when Jesus died he died for our sin, and when He rose again He gave us new life through the cross. Help us to hold on to the guarantee of our baptism, so that every day we can live for you. Amen.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Excuses, Excuses

As people it is very natural to us (part of our sinful nature) to excuse and justify any wrong things we do, and we develop this 'skill' over our lifetimes.

- What are some excuses you use to justify your thoughts, feelings, words and actions, if not out loud at least to yourself? (you don't have to share these out loud if you don't wish to)
- There may be excuses you are making, or attitudes you have, which are leading you to not 'live for God' in all things. How can you ask God for both the will and the strength to make the effort to fix these?

The Guarantee of Our Baptism

Our baptism is mentioned four times in this reading, and the word used here is a passive verb, ie, our baptism is done to us, by God, it is not our work. That's great, because it means that all we receive through our baptism, and the strength of its guarantee, doesn't rely on us in any way but on God.

- Reflect on the meaning of your baptism to you. Whether you can remember it or not it was the beginning of the transforming power of God through the Holy Spirit in your life. What does your baptism mean to you?
- 'But I am baptised' was a saying of Martin Luther's to help him through any tough times he had. How can the guarantee of God's love and forgiveness given to you in your baptism help you to make an effort to overcome sin and follow God more closely?

Make an Effort, Not an Excuse

We all have things in our lives we find it hard to let go of, even though we know they are wrong: a resentment we find hard to forgive, a vice we find hard to ignore, an impulse we find hard to control, a responsibility we find hard to fulfill, a desire we find it hard to push aside.

- Think about anything in your life which you know is wrong, but you find it difficult to deal with by yourself (obviously you don't have to share this out loud).
- Perhaps now, even if you are with others, spend some quiet time in prayer, asking God to help you to acknowledge these things, asking for His forgiveness through Jesus, and praying for His strength in overcoming them.
- Finish by thanking God for all that He has done for us, and all that He is for us. If someone wants to do so, have a short prayer together asking God for His strength and guidance to follow Him in all ways.

Pastor Andrew Koehler 21.06.2020