**March 8, 2020 Romans 6:3-14**

***Lenten Postcards: Identity***

**Scripture:** Romans 6:3-14 NRSV

*(3)Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (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. (6)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. (7)For whoever has died is freed from sin. (8)But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. (9)We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. (10)The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. (11)So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (12)Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. (13)No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. (14)For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

**Notes:**

1. Our ***identity*** is important.
   1. ***Remember*** who you are.
   2. Find your ***identity*** in Christ
2. Baptism ***unites*** us in the death of Christ.
   1. United in the death of Christ gives us an ***identity***.
   2. The way of the cross was one of very real ***suffering***.
3. Follow Christ even in the face of the most difficult ***obstacles***.
   1. ***Sow*** ***seeds*** of resurrection in the most difficult places.
   2. Be ***instruments*** of righteousness in the world.
   3. Live in ***hope***.
   4. God does not leave us to be trapped in our sin; we can be ***free*** from the power of sin.
4. Our identity is ultimately found in being ***united*** in Christ’s death and resurrection.
   1. Our ultimate identity should be found in ***Christ***.
   2. Who am I in the ***Kingdom*** of ***Heaven***?
5. He calls us to be ***united*** with him that we may know the ***power*** that gives us the ***courage*** and ***boldness*** to enter our world a with words of hope and power.
   1. Have you ***submitted*** yourself to the will of the Lord;
   2. Take time to remember our ***baptism***, and who we are.
   3. Join the ***mission*** of God in the world.

**Transcript:**

Identity, I have struggled with my identity for as long as I could remember. I have wondered who I am; wondering how I am supposed to behave and act. Wondering how I am supposed to think and what type of attitude I should have. Wondering what I should be interested in. Wondering who my friends should be, and wondering who and what I should steer away from. Throughout my life there have been many moments of doubt, fear, and confusion; as I tried to figure out these things, as I tried to become the person I thought I was supposed to be, and tried to become the person I wanted to be, as I tried to have the family that I truly wanted and raise my children to be responsible adults.

Our identity is important; so important, in fact, that we spend time, energy, and money “finding” ourselves. There are many tools to work through this process; the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator, StrengthsFinders, the 5Q APEST Assessment, Emotional Intelligence Assessment, and numerous other personality tests and spiritual gift assessments. Finding a self-identity is an important developmental marker of early adolescence. If you have a child in that age group, it might be frustrating to hear that, after weeks of being very passionate about one thing, they suddenly are very passionate about something totally different. Or, perhaps you remember the inner turmoil you felt at that age trying different outfits, styles of music, and social groups because you wanted to learn who you were. There is also something known as an identity crisis. Some associate this with being middle-aged. Some of you may be experiencing this now, as you wrestle with big questions about your life and the type of person you have been and the type of person you want to be. Identity is important.

Our passage today is about identity. But, where we often point toward personality traits or even interests as being the markers for our identity, Paul points somewhere else. He calls believers to remember their baptism. Paul proclaims that this initiating sacrament into the body of Jesus Christ; this act of grace, of being identified as one who belongs to Jesus is, in fact, the core identity for those of us who follow Jesus. It is like having a parent tell a child to remember the family name; remember who you are, remember where you come from, remember where you are going, and remember where you are.

This is an appropriate reminder in the season of Lent; because at the core of the work of Lent is this remembering our identity, stripping away the sin, the distractions, to once again find our identity in Christ. Would you turn with me to Romans 6:3-14, as we share in our sermon passage today.

*(3)Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (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. (6)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. (7)For whoever has died is freed from sin. (8)But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. (9)We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. (10)The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. (11)So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (12)Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. (13)No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. (14)For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.* Romans 6:3-14 NRSV

Did you hear that line in verse 3, “*Do you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*” Baptism unites us in the death of Christ. We all can see the practical symbolism of this death in the sacrament of baptism. Whether someone is baptized as an infant, a child, or an adult, there is an act of surrender in the midst of baptism. Water is sprinkled on somebody, or it is poured over someone, or someone is immersed into water, which not only shows a washing away but is also symbolic of surrendering to death. But even more so, we willingly allow another to place us under the water; to put us to death. Then that same someone raises us up, out of the water, with words of life and words of resurrection spoken over us.

I want you to pay special attention here; as we are called to be baptized, Jesus was also baptized. This act of baptism unites us with the mission of God in the world. Much like young boys wanting to be blood brothers. They pierce their skin and draw blood; then placing the wounds of each individual together, they declare that from that day on they share the same blood. Baptism is a bonding experience that draws the life of a believer into the life of the living Christ. Jesus was baptized at the beginning of his public ministry, showing the ways he was joining the mission of God in the world. The act of Jesus’s baptism was one of identity. When Jesus was baptized his identity as the Son of God was solidified in this great moment; as we see and hear the Three in One declared. God the Father declared Jesus as his one and only Son. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove. John the Baptist also speaks of the identity of Jesus as the Messiah.

Being united in the death of Christ gives us an identity as well. We are dying to sin. The baptismal vows include forsaking a life of sin, in order to illustrate the ways that baptism and “dying to sin” are connected. This “dying to sin” is also a death to selfishness. Our focus is no longer on ourselves but on love for God and others. Dying to sin also means joining a new mission in the restoration of the world. A large point for Paul here is that dying to sin is equal to dying to legalism. Trying to live by the letter of the law is not the focus of those following Jesus. Instead, the focus is on who we are called to be and who we are becoming in Christ.

However, for the early Christians listening to this, there was a promising possibility for a very real death. The way of the cross that Paul laid out for people was one of very real suffering. While most of this passage is metaphorical and speaking to the death of sin, there is also an overwhelming sense that people would read this passage and know that joining Christ could call for their lives being laid down for others in much the same way.

In baptism, resurrection has the final word. Being united in Christ’s death, means being united in Christ’s resurrection. This is not about how to die so much as how to live in the resurrection. Because of the resurrection, we don’t need to fear death. The church, this body of believers do not fear death because of the resurrection. We know that someday we will spend eternity with Jesus in His kingdom. So, we follow Christ even in the face of the most difficult obstacles. This is an important identifier for the members of the early church They often faced death for stating, “Jesus is Lord!” instead of declaring that “Caesar is Lord.” This is important for the global church today because people are killed for many of the same reasons.

This is important for us, even if we don’t face physical persecution or death for following Jesus. There will be difficult times for following the way of Christ. The church is able to sow seeds of resurrection in the most difficult places in the world. Many places in our world are darkened by violence, poverty, disease, and despair. And it case you did not know it These are the places where the church grows more quickly. As a people who identify with the resurrection, we are able to walk boldly into places other people wouldn’t want to go. We can be instruments of righteousness in the world. There is a hopeful optimism that death, in all of the ways it reveals itself, does not have to be the end.

The resurrection enables us to live in hope. Hope should be part of the baptized identity. We hope for the restoration and resurrection of all things. The resurrection God brings about in us is the work God wants to do in all people. Our call is to go into the world and baptize others, which means inviting them into this resurrection life too. We see later in Romans this groaning of the entire creation to be restored. We have hope that even the worst of the world will be renewed through resurrection. We hope for freedom from sin. This is a big part of Paul’s message here. We are no longer trapped in a cycle of sin but we are freed from it. For those of us who identify as Wesleyan/Holiness, this freedom from sin is a key element to our theology. God does not leave us to be trapped in our sin; through the resurrection, we can be free from the power of sin in our lives.

Our identity is ultimately found in our baptism: being united in Christ’s death and resurrection. This passage speaks of things that can be competing identities. We know people who use personality as an excuse for sin. Some refuse to live in the hope of conquering sin, and instead lead lives trapped in the same cycles. They think this is who I am, I cannot escape it. Many also define themselves by their past choices Even after being forgiven of their sin even after overcoming sin, instead of walking into the freedom of Christ; they allow themselves to be drawn back into the previous lifestyle that has led to sin. They cannot see a way of overcoming the person they once were. But, I may say that I am a sinner, but I always include the phrase “Saved by grace.” I am no longer the person who committed the sins that I am most embarrassed by. I have been forgiven; I am being changed… the Lord is now working in me to make me more like him.

Our ultimate identity should be found in Christ. Embracing this identity leads to freedom. The defining characteristic is grace, a focus on grace instead of works. Those of you with an identity rooted in Christ, join the mission of God in the world through lives lived as instruments of righteousness; as the hands and feet of Christ.

At one time it was very popular to ask the question, “What would Jesus do?” The question was posed to help people think through decisions. In a moment of decision, we would ask our self, “What would Jesus do?” And then we could act accordingly. But the question for those connected to Jesus by baptism is not a question of behavior modification, not a question of what we should do or how we should act… It is a question of identity transformation. Who would Jesus be? Who am I in the Kingdom of Heaven? I am redeemed, I have been adopted in to the family of God I am a Child of the King, I am a Joint Heir with Jesus.

Jesus, crucified and risen, calls us, both you and I, to the same path, to the same identity. He calls us to be united with him in his suffering and death, that we may know the power of his resurrection; that we may know His power over sin and over death; that we may know His power that gives us the courage and boldness to look into the darkest places of our world and enter with words of hope and power.

Have you been baptized in the baptism of Jesus death and resurrection. No, I am not talking about the act of coming into the water and being submerged underneath; signifying dying to the world and self. I am talking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit; have you had that exhilarating experience; of submitting yourself to the will of the Lord; surrendering your whole self to the will of God the Father, following in the steps of our Lord, Jesus Christ; and obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit as he guides and instructs you. Have you made the commitment to do whatever He asks of you?

And, have you demonstrated this commitment with an outward sign of God’s inward grace? Have you been baptized in the water to demonstrate your commitment? On the day of Pentecost after Peter shared the message of Jesus to all who could hear; The people who received the Holy Spirit asked, “Brothers what shall we do?” and Peter responded, “Repent, and be baptized.” It only makes sense to me that when you have received the Lord’s grace, when you have been forgiven your sins, and when you have decided to follow the Lord, that you should be baptized.

Have you demonstrated your commitment by being baptized? Well today I would like to extend an invitation that if you have not yet been baptized, that we take the next step in doing so. I will plan a baptism service for Pentecost Sunday, May 31st and if you would like to be baptized, we will do it on that day. In the meantime, you will need to let me know, so that we can plan accordingly. We can have a discussion regarding baptism and we can be prepared for that day.

Now as we enter more deeply into this season of Lent, let us take time to remember our baptism, to remember who we are, who we are as seen by the world, who we are as seen by yourself, who we are in the Kingdom of God; to join the mission of God in the world as we are transformed each day to look and behave more and more like Christ. Our Identity is in Him; let us never be confused again.