

## **“Have You Died Yet?”**

July 5, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Romans 6:1-11

Remember. Remember your baptism. Remember who you are. That is today's message.

First remember what has been going on in Romans. We read it together through Lent this year and really focused in on Romans 4 a month ago. We talked about Christians becoming part of God's family the same way as Abraham, the founder of God's people who came to be a member of God's family – through faith. When we believe God can and will do what God has promised, God counts that to us as righteousness. We don't establish ourselves as worthy of God by obedience to a strict moral or ethical code, but through belief. For when we believe God can and will do what God promises, God's grace kicks in and God forgives us, accepts us, and sends the Holy Spirit to help us. Thank you, Jesus, for not only coming with the message of God's grace, but paying for our sins that we might be forgiven.

But there is a problem. If I don't like the way you look at me, I am free to punch you in the nose. Since I am saved by grace through faith and not by righteous living, there is no need for me to live a righteous life. As long as I believe, God will forgive me and we pray each week for God to forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, which means you need to forgive me in order for you to be forgiven by God; which leaves me in the clear and you with a bloody nose. Being saved by grace through faith is a license to simply do whatever I want to whoever I want because my behavior doesn't matter. Or as verse 1 asks, since grace is a good thing, shouldn't we continue to sin in order that grace may abound.

Paul responds to this problem by asking us to remember our baptism. Paul is not encouraging us to remember who performed our baptism or who was there. He is not encouraging us to remember if we were baptized in a river, a lake, a pool or a baptistry. Paul doesn't care if we remember how old we were or if we wore a robe, if we were at church camp or in a worship service. What Paul wants us to remember is what happened. When we enter the waters of baptism, the person who enters stays there. That person who lived for the things of this world, whose priorities were defined by envy and greed, competing with others for control and a sense of belonging, that person went down into the watery grave. That person died and a new person came up out of the water. A person defined by Jesus – by who Jesus was and what Jesus did. A person who already belongs, a person who exercises their freedom by serving others, a person who uses their gifts and skills to lift others up, a person who is loved so deeply and so completely that love can't help but ooze out. Remember what happened at your baptism and remember who you are.

On the one hand it seems kind of silly for Paul to have to say it. If I had cancer and the doctor told me my cancer was gone and I no longer had to come for treatments 3 days a week. I am pretty sure you would not find me in the oncologist's office the next Monday, ready for my treatment. The cancer was dead. It didn't own me anymore. I think I would remember. On the other hand, Paul needs us to remember that a part of us died in our baptism. We know there is more to being alive than just processing oxygen into carbon dioxide. We have phrases like, "You haven't lived until you have tasted lobster fresh from the ocean" or "seen the Northern lights in person." "You haven't really lived until you have been in love and had your heart broken." Paul could hear the spirit behind statements like that, so he adopted it, but with a twist. He would say, "you haven't died if you think lobster, the northern lights or falling in love is the definition of life." According to Paul, dying is the key to life. In our short reading he uses death, died, and dead 13 times.

Now I am one of those Christians who identifies my faith more with Christ's resurrection than His crucifixion. If it were up to me, we would be wearing emblems of the empty tomb around our necks instead of a cross. But Paul calls us back to the cross, back to the death, and reminds us it is the only way to the empty tomb. Not just for Jesus, but for us. There needs to be death – the death that happens at our baptism, the death of the person who was enslaved to sin.

Now when I am talking about sin, I am not just talking about the things we do that go against God's will. Sin includes that, but sin is much bigger than that. Sin is the evil we have done and the good we have left undone. Sin also includes a network of incredible power. Anything that distances us from God is part of that network: the broken world in which we live, the broken people and relationships in our lives, the distance we build between ourselves and our next-door neighbors as well as our neighbors in different cultures and different socio-economic classes. Augustine likens sin to addiction. Nobody held a sword to his throat and forced him, but Augustine willingly followed his lust, for it soothed his loneliness and helped ease his pain. Yet each time he willingly yielded to his desires, one more link was forged until he was held tight by a chain of his own making. What started out as self-medicating became enslaving and soon owned him. For Augustine it was lust, for you it might be needing to perceive yourself as better than others in one way or another, which leads to envy, greed, and ambition. It shows itself in our need to degrade others because of their political or cultural affiliation. It divides one person from another and thereby further distances us from them and the God who calls us to love them. It starts out soothing our confusion and medicating the tension, but soon becomes our master and pulls us away from God.

Then Romans calls us back to the cross, back to our baptism, and proclaims the person who followed and even valued those things is the person who died in the baptismal waters with Jesus. Those chains are the chains of sin baptism washed away. The person who wants to punch another in the nose stayed in the water. The person who needs to put others down in order to

sooth their insecurities stayed in the water. The enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, greed, drunkenness, arrogance and rudeness stayed in the water. A new person came out. A person free from the need to fight for control or belonging. A person free from the need to somehow prove they are better than others. A person free from wanting to do anything but good to another person – no matter who they are. You are free. Free from your self-soothing addictions. Free to follow Jesus. Free to serve those less fortunate than you. Free to love and forgive yourself and others.

It is who you are as a baptized follower of Jesus. Remember who you are. Being free to do whatever you want is not a problem, because who you are in Jesus only wants to be a gift. Remember who you are.

As we celebrate 250 years of freedom as a nation, we also celebrate 1993 years of freedom as a people – a people of God. Free from the world's self-centered version of justice. Free from the need to self-medicate and sooth our hurts and egos at the expense of our neighbors. Free from the enslaving chains of our own making. Free to be who God frees us to be: givers, healers, listeners, servants, gifts of love and acceptance. That is who you are.

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Mike Van Heyningen