Isaiah 43:1–7

**But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. 3For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. 4Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. 5Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. 6 I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, 7everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”**

Romans 6:1–11

**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

**5For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

Luke 3:15–22

**As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, 16John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”**

**18So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. 19But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, 20added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.**

**21Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, 22and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”**

As you know about 2 ½ years ago Susan and I moved out into the country. While living in the country is great, the reason we bought the place is the ponds. There’s something tranquil about water. After you sit by or in the water a while, the neck muscles, tightened by life’s tensions, relax and let go, almost making you fall asleep. We sit on the deck me in the shade and Susan in the sun… It’s so very peaceful! It’s quite easy to fall asleep and Susan often does.

I like to think of the waters of Holy Baptism being much the same.

Lives lived in separation from God, are lived under the world’s philosophy. Worldly logic says that as we are forgiven for our sin, when we sin again we’re forgiven again and the more we sin the more we are forgiven makes sense!

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we well know that this kind of logic simply doesn’t work. It may satisfy our unwholesome interests for a while, but in the long run, it will fail every time!

It is comforting to know and believe that because we died with Christ, we now live anew by God’s gift to us of water and Word! That is to say that by dying through the waters of Holy Baptism the people of God live! And that means our lives now stand in stark contrast to what they once were!

As nice as this sounds and as good as it is, don’t think that all is well and good! Satan looks at this and devises a plan to extricate us from our faith in Jesus! He and his minions will stop at nothing until they’ve accomplished their mission. He even entices us with the “dangling carrot,” if you please, that the more we sin the more God will shower us with His grace, and the Roman Christians were falling for it! That’s the premise for our text. Paul has to take up this question: **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”** We don’t need any lifestyle change whatsoever, they were saying, so live life as you want.

We might fall for it too. “I know marriage is supposed to be between one man and one woman, but I guess God’s grace covers that, right? I don’t want to be insensitive to some­one else’s feelings, right? I mean, God wouldn’t really send somebody to hell if he doesn’t repent, would he?”

“I know sex is supposed to be just in marriage, but what we do isn’t, like, horrible. We really like each other. We’ll probably get married someday. God’s gracious, loving. He won’t really send us to hell if we don’t repent, right?”

“I know God says in the Bible ‘I hate divorce’ (that’s Mal 2:16, by the way) “but God would surely understand mycircumstances. Surely He’ll let it slide.”

Now what’s wrong with this picture? Well, for one, this is Satan talking, not the Lord. Satan doesn’t listen to Holy Scripture, doesn’t like Holy Scripture, and won’t honor the words of Holy Scripture. He disdains it and tries to get us to question its authenticity and accuracy. When faced with the truth, he will try to use it against us. He will twist the Word into something unrecognizable to anyone but the “old Adam” in us! This broken logic, what the world clings to so tightly, will never hold water in the face of God’s Word! God’s judgment on unrepentant sin, continuing in sin when we know it’s against what he says in Scripture, is exactly what He says in Scripture that it is: eternal suffering in hell.

Paul says we can’t even think about continuing in sin. We are dead to all of this nonsense! **“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death.”**  Most people are satisfied to live and function in this perverse thinking and doing. But Paul reminds the Roman congregation that this kind of perverse thinking has no power over us. Our sin has been drowned. We have been set free from all these sins, not because they don’t matter, but because Jesus died for them. We are forgiven because Jesus took all these sins to the cross. Our sexual sins, our sins of silence when we know others are sinning, our failures to keep our marriage vows, all were nailed to Jesus’ cross, taken away from us.

Therefore, when we repent, turn away from those sins, we no longer bear the punishment we’ve earned. We’re delivered from hell to heaven! **“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his”**

So, then, just how does the Church, God’s people, continue to live in this world? How do we live in this world but not let the world’s authority and power take over our lives? How do we live now since we have **“died to sin,”** drowned, and been buried with Christ in Baptism? Very good questions, don’t you agree?

I know many of you are heavily involved in scouting and swimming and diving are part of your training. I am reminded of an incident that I read about that happened near Wichita. The fire department was called to an accident in one of the many sandpits that surround Wichita. A fishing boat had overturned and someone had drowned. Well there were a group of boy scouts there training in scuba diving and they were asked to help in the search. They geared up, tested their regulators, buddied up and went into the dark waters in search of the body. It was a sad duty, because someone had died. But after completing their work, they emerged from the dark waters and once again breathed God’s air! As they worked their hope was always that the one who had drowned would also emerge from death to God’s fresh air of heaven.

That’s very much what happens in Holy Baptism, isn’t it? In Baptism, we dive into the depths and reemerge again to breathe fresh air. We’ve died to sin and are brought back to new life in Christ!

Baptism offers us this new life! **“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”**  This new life is quite different, because the power of God’s Word has taken over our lives. How we conduct our daily life is different. Oh, this isn’t to say we won’t ever sin again; we will, and often! But Baptism says that Satan’s old perverse distortion of this Word will have no power over us ever again! The “old Adam” in each of us has been nullified! We now reflect the glory of the Father. The glory made available through a cross and empty tomb. We now reflect this “new life” in our world just as Paul did after his Damascus road experience, and we do it gladly and willingly. The old has gone. That’s the way it has to be, you know! We cannot go on living back there! We share the resurrection of Jesus!

So, breathe your new life and live it to the fullest in Christ Jesus! Oh, and don’t be bashful about telling someone you know who is mired and living in the past! Amen.