

Romans 6:(1-2)3-11; 7th a. Pentecost. (6th a. Trinity) 3.7.2016

Change is not optional

[Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? ² Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?] ³ Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? ⁴ For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

⁵ Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. ⁶ We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. ⁷ For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin.

⁸ And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. ⁹ We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him.

¹⁰ When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹ So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

Do you know someone who has given up smoking. Some people say that giving up smoking is no big deal - they do it every day (the problem of course is that they don't!)

People give up smoking, for others it may be giving up alcohol - or even chocolate. The thing is that most of us know someone who has done it - it may even be you. Giving up a habit - which may have become an addiction - is not easy. And yet people do it!

How is it then that people say - with regard to other things -: "We can't change! This is how we were born / this is the way (and you can put in the family name of your choice here) are!

Whether it is stopping a habit which is harmful to your health, or whether it is giving up ways in which we so often live, because they harm our new life as people of God, one thing must be clear to us:

Change is not optional

Change is part of who we have become as people of God!

In the preceding chapter Paul speaks of Christ's wonderful act of saving us, and giving us peace with God (Romans 5:1) - something we had done nothing to

deserve! In fact it was "When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just at the right time and died for us sinners ... So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God." (Romans 5:6+11)

At the beginning of chapter 6 Paul addresses something which we may all feel at some time - surely it can't be that bad, if we once again do those things which we now know to be wrong. After all, God will forgive us. That's a bit like a dry alcoholic saying: Surely it won't harm me to have a glass of the good stuff - just this once (for old times sake). Or for a smoker who has given up the habit: Surely it won't matter if I buy just this one pack of smokes again (after all coffee tastes so much better if you light up!)

Now it must be clear to us, the change that happens as a result of baptism is not to be put on the same level as the change when we give up a habit or an addiction. The change that happens when someone gives up smoking or drinking lies within the person to a large degree. Of course they receive help from those around them, but it is up to them to stick with the programme!

The change which comes about through baptism is quite different - and that is underlined by what Paul speaks of here.

Paul writes **that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death.** Here is something more than giving up an old life-style which is harmful to us. It is about being joined with Christ - with his death on the cross for us. **For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism.**

In our Baptism God acted! It may be true that we do not see all of this taking place when we see someone being baptised - and it does not matter how this baptism took place or how old the person being baptised is. Yet, in baptism it is a case of dying and being buried with Christ. The sinful self was nailed to the cross, died and was buried. But that was not all: **And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.**

Our new life is not just a figure of speech! It is something very real! This is not simply a transplant that was undertaken to give us a shot at new life again. This is being made totally new. The literal translation of Titus 3 - a verse quoted in conjunction with the 3rd part of Baptism in the Catechism - says: "He (God) saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

Just as being born is not something we do, regeneration is something that happens with us - it is the work of renewing us which the Holy Spirit carries out. But it happens to us! This is not something which we simply document by framing a baptismal certificate, and looking at it when we wipe the dust off it. It is not just something we keep safe - like an insurance document - in case of emergency.

What God did in our baptism is to make us entirely new. A person who is now at peace with God - who now belongs to the family of God. That is not something we could do, and yet there is something we must do. It is up to you and me to accept this change, and to apply what God has made us to be in our everyday life!

Now I stated just now that the change God brings about in baptism is quite different to the change that comes about when we give up smoking or using alcohol. Yet there similarities in the way in which we deal with this new status. You may be aware that not everyone gives up smoking in the same way.

There are some who are able to give up smoking from one day to the next. I know of someone who was told by his doctor that he needed to give up smoking for his health - he sealed the promise by shaking the doctor's hand - and that was it (I profited by receiving a pack of very nice cigars).

Others have much greater difficulty giving up smoking - even though they know what is good for them, it is very hard for them to actually carry it through. Their struggle may take a long time before they are eventually able to live 'smoke-free'.

When God changes us in our baptism, we will not all have the same experience living this new life - and that applies to those baptised as infants as much as it does to those baptised later in life. For some of us changing certain aspects of our life just seem very hard - and that is when we fall back on the excuse: "I can't change. This is how I was born."

But that is a lie - because you and I have been reborn. We have - literally - died as the person we were born as, and have been raised with Christ to a new life. Because this promise is so important, God tied it to the act of baptism. From the moment the waters of baptism were poured on me, I have become this new

person. It is not a case of what I feel, but of what God has done! And we may look back to a date when this took place - the date on which God sealed his promise of making us new, as he wrapped his loving arms around us in our baptism.

Just as we celebrate our birthday, it might be a good idea to celebrate our baptism day - the day of our rebirth. But it is more than that, that is required. You may remember the fourth part of Baptism, which speaks of taking up your renewal by God on each new day. This reflects what Paul addresses at various places when he says: "In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (NIV - Galatians 3:26-27); and also: "... **let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God – truly righteous and holy.**" (Ephesians 4:23-24; NLT)

Putting on new clothing - we wear clothes appropriate for the occasion, whether it be for church this morning, for some sporting activity or to go for a swim, or for a wedding. What we wear in some ways also influences how we act.

The clothing we are to wear as the new people of God is Christ himself! It is the armour Paul speaks about which is to protect us from all attacks against us (Ephesians 6:10-17) - because we are under attack! We are to wear Christ and all he gives us, so that we are influenced in how we act.

A number of sportsmen have made it known that they will not be going to the Rio Olympics because of the Zika virus. There are other viruses that threaten our life or just cause us discomfort for a certain time. There are precautions that we may take so that we don't get the virus - so that we safeguard our health.

We are to do no less for our new life in Christ - we need to be aware of the 'virus' which threatens us. I need to be aware of the danger which there is for me - and you need to be aware what it is that threatens you. And then we are to take appropriate action - that may mean avoiding certain things or places; or it may involve taking the protection Christ gives us into certain situations, as we clothe ourselves with his presence - as we receive for ourselves once again the promise that we have died to the old life, and have been made entirely new.

Change is not optional - because without change there is no lasting life!