

January 12, 2020 – Romans 6:1-11

You may not realize it, but many of the parents in this room owe a great debt to a man named Georges de Mestral. De Mestral was a Swiss engineer, who took a walk in the woods in 1941 and noticed how burs clung to his pants and to the fur of his dog. He wondered how that phenomenon might be turned into something useful.

After years of research and trial and error, de Mestral came up with two strips of material, one with thousands of tiny hooks, the other with thousands of tiny loops into which the hooks would stick. He named his invention Velcro. And parents around the world owe him their gratitude for making children's shoes so much simpler.

I bring this up because St. Paul writes to the Romans about being Velcro'ed to Christ. OK, that's might be a silly way of saying it, but it's not a terrible image. Paul makes clear that in Baptism God connects us with our Savior. In Baptism, we are Velcro'ed to him. Attached to him. Connected to him.

Now to say that Baptism connects us to Christ implies something very important. It means that prior to our Baptism, we were disconnected from Christ. And that's exactly what scripture confirms, in no uncertain terms.

In fact, "disconnected" might be an understatement. In Ephesians 2, Paul describes our condition prior to Christ as being "dead in our trespasses." He calls us "children of wrath." In other words, we are conceived and born under the wrath of God because of our sin.

I've known plenty of people who would argue with this notion. Who insist that children are born innocent and holy. How could they possibly be sinners subject to God's wrath?

Well, to be blunt, as the father of a five year old, children – even tiny ones – are most definitely sinners. Not simply because of what they do. But because of the inclination of their nature. No one has to teach a child to be selfish. To be vengeful. To be deceitful. They learn that all on their own. It bubbles up out of their depths of their sinful hearts. They are born disconnected from Christ. We are each born disconnected from Christ.

And this was not the way it was supposed to be. To be made in the image of God is to have a connection to him. The image of God that Adam and Eve had was not a physical image. It was a spiritual image. In which they were connected to God, he was connected to them. And they walked together in the Garden without fear or shame.

The fall into sin was the end of that connection. It was a shattering of that image, so that there was nothing recognizable about God within us. So that we really were spiritually dead the very moment we ate that fruit. So that we were children of wrath from that day forward.

Therefore, Baptism is not simply a symbol or ceremony. It is an act of God to restore his image within us. To reconnect us to Christ, like we once we were. And God does that in two ways.

First, God connects us to Christ's death. Paul writes, "*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.*"

We are so closely connected with Christ's death in our Baptism, that it's as if we've traveled back two thousand years and are there with Christ. Our sinful hearts nailed to the cross. Our sinful souls buried in the tomb with him. We were born dead in our trespasses, and on Good Friday that dead spirit was Velcro'ed to Christ's dead body and sealed in the tomb.

But just as God did not leave his own Son to rot in the tomb, so He does not leave us either. No, he treats us as his own beloved children. In Baptism, he buries us with Christ, and then raises us with Christ to new life.

And I love the grammar Paul uses here. You've probably heard me say this before, but I'm going to say it again. We were baptized, we were buried with Christ, and we are raised just as Christ was raised. It's all passive voice. It is something done to us by God himself.

We are passive actors in this great moment when God the Father Velcros us to his Son and says, “You broke this connection. In your sinfulness you wanted to be your own gods. You wanted nothing to do with me. But I still love you. And I am connecting you to my Son. I am connecting you to his new, resurrected life. I am giving you his image once again.”

And yet, the grammar doesn't stay passive. It quickly switches to active. This is all done for us in order that we too much walk in newness of life. We are no longer dead. We are alive and walking and praising God for all that he has done for us.

We walk in active voice and we walk in present tense. This “newness of life” is something we are walking in right now. It is not something we have to wait for our death to experience. We have it right here and now.

We were dead in our trespasses and sins. Now, God has raised us to new life in and through Baptism. And this new life is a life in which we no longer live for ourselves, but for Christ, who reconciled us to God once again. It is a life in which we no longer live to gratify our sinful desires, but rather live to please our gracious God.

This is what Paul means when he writes, “*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” When you are “dead” to something, you don't respond to it – just as a dead person doesn't respond to anyone or anything.

We were dead to God in our sins. Unable to recognize his image. Unable to respond to his Word. Unable to obey his commands. We were utterly dead to him.

But now we are dead to sin in our baptism. Now we know that we are the children of God, created by him to do good works. Now we know His Word and the power it has to change us. Now we hear God's Laws and desire to obey them. Desire to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Desire to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Yet, at the same time, we also know that we will not be free from sin this side of heaven. We are still going to sin, even as we walk in this newness of life. The difference is that we don't live to sin. We don't spend our lives hopelessly drowning in our temptations and failures. We don't spend every day ashamed of our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Instead, we repent of our sin daily. And we live daily in the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. And daily we walk in the newness of life that God gave us in our Baptism.

And it's a new life that doesn't end when life here on this earth ends. Paul writes, “*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.*” We are not just Velcro'ed to Christ in this mortal life. Just as Christ was raised from the dead – physically, bodily, raised from the dead – so will we be raised from the dead.

This is the sure and certain hope we have as the baptized children of God. Death is not the end. Death does not have the final say. Death is but a doorway into an eternal life in the presence of God with all who have gone before us and all who will come after us.

And as this one communion of saints, we await that day when Christ will return. He will not return in meekness and humility as he came to be with us the first time. He will come in all power, glory, and majesty.

On that day, our bodies will be raised, just as his body was raised. On that day, our bodies will be changed to be like his glorious body. Our bodies will be, to quote Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, “incorruptible, imperishable, and immortal.” Without sin. Without sickness. Without death.

And on that day, all of humanity will stand before Christ. But fear not. For your name is written in the Book of Life. And you will be eternally as you are today: Velcro'ed to Christ. Connected to Christ. Baptized in Christ Jesus. Amen.