

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *From the River to the Mountain*

Service Theme: *It Begins with Baptism*

Sermon Theme: *“You’re Dead to Me!”*

January 14, 2024—Romans 6:1-11

This past Fall, I heard about a somewhat bizarre trend that went viral on social media, where women recorded themselves asking their boyfriends, husbands, fathers, or other men, ***“How often do you think about the Roman Empire?”*** Anybody hear about this? It seems like a strange question. After all, how often could a defunct ancient empire possibly be crossing modern men’s minds? But the reason the trend garnered over 1 billion views on TikTok, is that a surprising number of men shared unprompted that they think about the Roman Empire regularly, some even multiple times per day! Whether it’s the vast reach of the Roman Empire, gladiators in combat, Roman architectural achievements and innovations, or more simplistic reasons like, “Because it’s cool!” a lot of men—and undoubtedly some women too—spend a lot of time thinking about the Roman Empire.

This morning, I want to do a similar challenge—although assuredly it won’t go viral on TikTok. I want to ask you, ***“How often do you think about...baptism?”*** Maybe you think about baptism when a baptism happens in a church service, or when it’s your “baptism birthday,” or the anniversary of your children’s baptisms. Maybe you think about baptism on this Sunday of the church year when we focus on Jesus’ baptism. But what about on a random Tuesday in September? Or while you’re sitting in your office? Or on the 4th of July? If you’re like most people, you probably don’t think about baptism much at all. It’s almost as if we view baptism as important on the day it happened, and on the day you die, but we don’t have to think about it much in the time in between.

But I want the idea to go viral for you that baptism is something we should be thinking about all the time, and reflecting on every day of our lives! I want you to take to heart that your baptism has meaning

not just on the day of your baptism, but every day after; that your baptism has impact not just for your death, but also for your life!

As our service theme states, ***It Begins with Baptism***; that is, Jesus’ baptism which we celebrate today. You might wonder, “What does Jesus’ baptism have to do with us?” Actually, Jesus’ baptism is so important for us that we’d do well to think about it each day!

Befitting his “short and sweet” writing style, Mark’s Gospel records simply, but powerfully, ***“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”***

Jesus’ baptism is meaningful for us in a number of ways. First, it reminds us of Jesus’ purpose. In ancient Israel, when God called someone to serve in an important position like a prophet, priest, or King of Israel—he would have a prophet anoint that person by pouring oil over their head. This visibly announced that God had chosen them for a special purpose.

At Jesus’ baptism, he was anointed not with oil, but with water and the Holy Spirit, to show that God had chosen him to serve the most important purpose of saving the world from sin! After his baptism, Jesus began his earthly ministry of salvation, empowered and equipped by the Holy Spirit for the task.

Second, Jesus’ baptism also reminds us of his identity. He is our perfect substitute, the one who came to take our place. And therefore, he is everything that we are, and does everything that God calls us to do. Not that Jesus, the perfect son of God had any sins that needed to be washed away, but as Jesus told John the Baptist, ***“It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”*** God the Father’s proclamation from heaven also reveals Jesus’ true identity: ***“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*** The fact that Jesus’ baptism points to him as the Son of God and our Savior certainly makes his

baptism worth remembering and reflecting on more than just once a year!

Like Jesus' baptism, we also want to regularly remember and reflect on our own baptisms, especially because of what God's Word says baptism does for us! Baptism is always connected with the forgiveness of sins and salvation in Scripture. As the Apostle Peter commanded the crowd on Pentecost, ***"Repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,"*** and as he later wrote in his first Epistle, ***"Baptism...now saves you also."*** Through God's powerful Word, connected with water in Baptism, God assures us of forgiveness and eternal life, and the Holy Spirit creates or strengthens faith in people's hearts! When you were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God put his name on you. Just like we write our name on things that belong to us, God put his name on you to show that through baptism, we're made God's own child! Therefore, at your baptism God spoke-- if not audibly-- just like he did at Jesus' baptism: ***"You are my son, my daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*** I'd say that makes our baptisms worth constantly thinking about and reflecting on, right?

But God doesn't promise and provide these wonderful blessings in baptism because baptism is some ritual God wants us to perform. Rather, God uses baptism as a miraculous means through which he connects us to Christ, and everything he's done to save us! As the Apostle Paul writes in our sermon text, ***"Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his."*** By connecting us to Jesus by faith, baptism makes Jesus' atoning, sacrificial death on the cross our sacrificial, atoning death on the cross. Baptism makes Jesus' resurrection from the grave the promise of our own resurrection from the grave when Jesus comes again at the Last Day!

We want to remember and reflect on our baptism every day, because our baptism empowers us to live! And it empowers us to live a new life through...death!

If I told you that every time I do a baptism, someone dies, you might worry that I'm using too much water! But it's true! Every time a baptism takes place, there's a death. On the day you were baptized, you died too. As Paul writes in Romans, ***"We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death. Our old self was crucified with [Jesus] so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."***

At your baptism, your sinful nature, or "old Adam" or "old self," as it's sometimes called, was drowned. Before someone is brought to faith, they're completely enslaved by their sinful nature, which motivates us not to serve God, but to serve ourselves and our own sinful desires. But at baptism where we're brought to faith, and connected to Jesus' death and resurrection, that sinful nature is put to death—held down under the waters until the bubbles stop. Therefore, at your baptism, your sinful nature died, so that you can live a new life! As Paul writes, ***"Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."*** That's our new life; our new reality; our new identity! Dead to sin, and alive to God!

Sainted former Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor Siegbert Becker once reflected on a story from his childhood. He attended a small Christian school, where his teacher was the only church organist. So every time there was a funeral, all the students attended with their teacher. After the funeral, they would take the casket outside for burial in the church cemetery. In those days, the custom was during the prayer and blessing at the end of the committal, one of the church elders would toss shovelfuls of dirt into the hole. Prof. Becker reflected on the unforgettable sound of heavy clods of dirt banging on top of the pine lid of the casket, and remarked that every time he

performed a baptism in his ministry, he heard that sound. “In the name of the Father...(Thud!)...and of the Son...(Thud!)...and of the Holy Spirit...(Thud!). Because at our baptism, God is tossing dirt on the coffin of our sinful nature!

Which is why, as we reflect on our baptism every day, we can say to our sinful nature, **“You’re Dead to Me!”** Hopefully no one’s ever said that to you, because that phrase means you have no use for that person anymore; that you no longer want any connection to them; that they hold no power over you anymore. Because of our baptism, we can tell our sinful nature, “You’re dead to me!” No longer do we live under the unbreakable power of our sinful nature. Through faith, we now get to live a new life in our new identity as children of God! Not only has our baptism freed us from the penalty of our sin, it’s also freed us from the power of sin!

At our baptism, our sinful nature was drowned. But the problem is, our sinful nature is a good swimmer! Day after day, it keeps resurfacing; tempting us; troubling us; trying to get us to live according to those old sinful desires instead of in our new life! And if we’re honest, how often he succeeds in doing so!

But friends, you’ve been set free from slavery to sin, so don’t put the shackles back on! You’ve been raised back to life from the dead, so don’t get back in the casket! Live in the new life of freedom God’s given you through Baptism!

Which is why Martin Luther writes in the Catechism, ***“Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”***

Every single day, we need to tell our sinful nature, “You’re dead to me!” I have no use for you anymore. I no longer want any connection to you. You hold no power over me anymore! You’re dead to me!” Every single day as we remember our baptism and what it means for

us, we hold that sinful nature down under the water and drown it, freed from its power we can live a new life in our new identity!

And when our sinful nature resurfaces, and we fail and fall into sin, in contrition and repentance, we go back to our baptism again, for the assurance that all our sins were washed away! So that, motivated by the love of God and the forgiveness Christ which we received in baptism, we strive to live in our new identity—dead to sin and alive to God. Equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit poured out on us at our Baptism, we strive to carry out the purpose God has called us to!

So, spend less time thinking about the Roman Empire, and more time thinking about Baptism! Every day; every moment of our lives, we can be encouraged, empowered, comforted, and motivated by remembering our baptism and all it means for us. So why not be intentional about starting each day remembering your baptism? Start your day ***“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”*** the same words spoken at your Baptism. Frame your baptism certificate and hang it in a visible place you’ll see every day. Every time you feel the seductive allure of your sinful nature, say to it with all the spite and venom you can muster, “You’re dead to me!” Because remembering baptism—Jesus’ and yours’ will help us to better live in our new identity: Dead to sin, and alive in Christ.