

Reckon...Yield

7th Sunday after Trinity
(From the *Epistle: Romans vi. 19 ff.*)

Epistle from Trinity VI:

3 Know ye not , that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? **4** Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. **5** For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: **6** Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed , that henceforth we should not serve sin. **7** For he that is dead is freed from sin. **8** Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: **9** Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. **10** For in that he died , he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth , he liveth unto God. **11** Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verses from Romans 6 not Included in *Epistles* from Trinity VI & VII:

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. **13** Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. **14** For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. **15** What then? shall we sin , because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid . **16** Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey ; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? **17** But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you . **18** Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

Today's Epistle:

19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. **20** For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. **21** What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed ? for the end of those things is death. **22** But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. **23** For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This chapter from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans is especially significant because it discusses the implications of baptism.

In this casual age, we tend to to be very dubious about the significance of *anything*. The products we purchase, regardless of the price tag, rarely come through with the level of performance that the hype associated with their advertisement had promised. We really don't expect much from anything, so when it comes to those things upon which we should --*must*-- place the

highest of premiums, the disillusionment and dismissal that characterizes so much of our lives tends to jade our view of everything.

But Christian baptism is an extraordinarily important event in the life of a believer. It marks our entry into the Kingdom, our actual rebirth as new creations in Christ. Elsewhere baptism is spoken of as actually *saving* us (1 Peter 3:21). It is as important to the New Testament believer as circumcision was to the Old (Colossians 2:11, 12). It is a rite of passage, in every possible sense. What I wish to underscore here is the reality of this event, in terms of its implications.

How much more real can we get than when we start talking about things in terms of *life* and *death*? (all are quotes from Romans 6):

3 Know ye not , that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. 10 For in that he died , he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth , he liveth unto God. 11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

13...yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Dead is *dead*. Alive is *alive*. One can't be "30% dead" or "59% alive". To identify with the death of Jesus is to be made one with no sort of easy, died-in-his-sleep type of departure from this world. It was a protracted, cruel death, and the evidences of His actual decease were carefully noted by the beloved apostle John (John 19:34). This is very important, because the chapter in Romans from which today's Epistle is drawn hinges our victory over sin entirely upon our identification with Christ's death in baptism, and in every moment of our lives subsequent to it: *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (6:11, the last verse of last week's Epistle).

This important chapter seems to provoke a psychological condition called "cognitive dissonance" on a number of levels! We are instructed to believe in a fact, on one hand, that seems to be utterly contradicted by reality on the other hand. How can we be *dead* and *alive* at the same time? And if we are aware of the presence of sin in our lives, which we all are, how do we properly understand its presence if we have *indeed died unto sin*? The answer is in this peculiar and outdated KJV phrase: *Reckon ye also yourselves....* The NIV renders it: *count yourselves to be....* It's as if everything that is necessary to fully reap the limitless benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ has been made available to the believer. But we are still very much "caught", as it were, both in this world which lives in opposition to the Gospel, and in these bodies that still contain the passions of sin. We are in a state of transition that will culminate in *the end, everlasting*

ing life and the complete realization of those benefits. In the meantime, while here, we are to take advantage of the graces which we have been provided through the redemption of Christ to fight successfully against the power and presence of sin in our lives:

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. 13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (from those verses from the chapter omitted from the Trinity VI and VII Epistles)

We can also resist the fear of death:

8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: 9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

And we can also be free to serve God without hindrance:

19 ...even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

The consequence, in other words, of giving our physical bodies over to Christ for service to Him will be *holiness*, the opposite of *uncleanness*. *Holiness* is surely the loveliest of words, for it means, in its original, “consecration”, “purification”. But *uncleanness* is the opposite, for it means, as one biblical commentator puts it, “in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living” (Thayer).

Reckon ye also yourselves.... This is indeed our constant part in the matter. What does it mean? I might reckon myself to have a million dollars in my bank account, but would it be proven true? I might reckon myself to be six feet four inches tall, but would it affect my stature? I could reckon myself to be vastly superior to everyone else, but would it be according to reality? None of these exercises in reckoning are any good, because the premises they are based upon are false, or non-existent. There is nothing to back up the reckoning. It is a mere presumptuous act of the imagination. But to reckon things to be true based upon solemn promises in God’s Word is quite another matter. In that case, if I fail to reap the benefits that are inherent in the promises, I can blame none other than myself for my failure to *reckon*.

It should be obvious, then, that this is a matter of making active and continual use of the promises of Scripture in the most practical of terms. They won’t just jump out of the pages of the Bible and into my vest pocket. I must do something about it. The instrumentality for the victory, the power, the blessing that I am seeking has been promised me. It has been firmly secured by the great redemptive actions of our Lord. But by a continual, conscious act of the will, I must employ that instrumentality on my own behalf. When sin and Satan stand before my path to threaten me --as a roaring lion, for so the Scripture puts it! (1 Peter 5:8)-- I must *reckon also myself to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*. If despair, sadness, unbelief, and doubt conspire against me *in the evil day* (Ephesians 6:13), I must draw upon the full force of the “legal document” presented to me at baptism which is placed there for

my constant use: the testimony of Christ's death and resurrection, to achieve the victory. This is the nature of true Christian living.

The Apostle Paul uses one other verb that will also be helpful to us. It is a very practical word.:

19 for as ye have yielded [elsewhere: offered, presented] your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. Yield. Give up. Put into service to... Submit to... Now, it is the peculiar quality of yielding myself that it can be done by none other than me. You cannot do this for me. My wife cannot. Not even God can fulfill this act for me. "Well," someone might imagine, "why do I need to be bothered with this at all. I'll neither yield to uncleanness, nor to righteousness, if I don't feel like it!" But there is no neutrality in this matter, for we must all "serve somebody", as a popular tune reminded us a few decades ago. Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, if we are not serving righteousness, we are, merely by default, serving unrighteousness. This is the game, and it cannot be played in any other fashion. The rules, having been written by God, cannot be rewritten. Made in the image of God, we are designed to serve. The results of what we serve, however, are drastically different: either *iniquity unto iniquity* --ever increasing sin, compounded over a lifetime, the result of which will be spiritual *death--*, or *righteousness unto holiness* --the continual expansion and development of God's goodness in and through us which will lead some day to complete transformation.

It is our baptism --our identification in the death and resurrection of Christ-- that is the source of our legal right to claim these extraordinary promises to be our own. We can raise them high for all the world to see. They are ours! Through them, we can *reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*. Through them, we have the power to turn the entire force of our wills away from service to sin and toward service to righteousness.

This is not the task of the passive or the indifferent, or the fearful and the unbelieving. More and more, with practice, as we flex these new faith muscles that will enable us to displace our doubts and replace them with hope and certainty, we will witness in the most everyday, ordinary ways the power of the Gospel in our individual lives.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.