

## You Are Alive!

I preach this morning in the name of God, the Father, the + Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the third Sunday after Pentecost and we continue in the church liturgical season in the Days Following Pentecost. As you can see here on the altar behind me and the ambo beside me, the color is green. I also am wearing a green stole because the green color symbolizes growth. In these Days Following Pentecost, and these days span the longest in the church liturgical calendar year, we focus our attention on growing in the Lord, on growing in the Holy Spirit. Fifty days after the Passover was observed, the Feast of Pentecost was celebrated, and the power and the person of the Holy Spirit was graciously and abundantly poured out upon all people.

Today, our focus is on growth, so let me ask you, how are you growing in the Lord? How are you growing in your understanding of living in the power and the person of the Holy Spirit that was poured out upon you in your Holy Baptism? How are you growing in your family? This is Father's Day, Men of God, you are the leader of your house. Are you faithfully leading your children and your wife in the admonition, in the fear of the Lord? Bringing them into the House of Worship to worship the Lord, whether it's online or in person? How are you leading your business? Are you faithfully leading your employees to the best business practices so as to honor and glorify Christ? How are you leading yourself? How are you growing in the Lord in your own personal quiet time?

Our focus is on growth and today understanding growth is knowing that you are alive because in the waters of Holy Baptism Jesus showers you in His grace. Jesus cancels the debt of your sin by uniting your life to His death. And Jesus raises you up to newness of life in His name. And that's what our lesson is about today, so let's take a look, it's Romans chapter 6.

Now, while you're turning there to Romans chapter 6, let me give some context for you for our lesson. In the verses and chapters previous to this, and really throughout the entire book of Romans, Paul is defending what we call the Doctrine of Justification. The Doctrine of Justification by Faith says that we are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, all of which has been revealed to us in the words of Holy Scripture alone. Paul, here in Romans chapter 6, is defending apologetically the defense of the Doctrine of Justification that we are saved by grace alone in Jesus Christ alone. He is, in a sense, saying in Romans chapter 3 the same thing, when he says in verse 10, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Paul begins by saying that we are all on the same playing field. And that is to say, we are all sinners in need of God's grace and mercy. He goes on to defend this position in verse 21 of the same chapter when he says, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rm. 3:21).

Paul is defending the Doctrine of Justification by Faith. And when you experience it, when you experience God's grace, you begin to live in it. And when you begin to live in it, it changes everything.

I'll never forget the time of my life when the grace of God was made known to me for the first time. In 2004, I attended a Chrysalis Flight. Some of you may be aware of this ministry; some of you may have even gone on the Emmaus Walk, but it's the same thing for younger students. And in 2004, I was about as lost as you could get. I was about in the depth of sin that I've ever been in in my life. I was lost; I was broken; I was looking for truth in all the wrong places. I was finding

my identity in what I did by my performance as a musician and as a percussionist. I was at the lowest place in my life. I went to Chrysalis Flight and, I'll tell you what, I never have been the same again. God's grace found me in the darkness of my life. When I was completely broken, when I had nowhere else to turn, the Lord in His grace, the Lord in His abundant mercy, said, "Brian, I've been calling you for so many years. You have strayed away from your baptism, but because of my grace, because of my mercy, I have you in my arms."

You see, the Lord never let me go. I wandered so far, but the Lord still had His eye on me. Maybe, you know a loved one, maybe it's your own son or daughter or grandchild, who has wandered so far. The Lord has His eye on them.

That was my experience of when God's grace captured my heart for the first time. And when you begin to experience it, you begin to live in it. And when you live in it, you defend it, Romans chapter 6, verse 1, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

You are alive today because in the waters of Holy Baptism, Jesus showers you in His abundant grace. You see, that's what happens in baptism when God claims your life as His own. There is nothing that you bring to the table except for a sinful, broken life and He puts you back together again. Day after day, His abundance and His grace and His everlasting and eternal love calls you to Himself. And you are alive today because He has showered you in His abundant grace and He continues to shower you, to bless you, to pour out the Holy Spirit upon you.

This is the abundance of His grace, but Paul gives a great warning. He's articulating apologetically this defense for the Doctrine of Justification by Faith, but he tells the church, "Do not abuse it." For he asks in verse 1, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" No way. "By no means!" Paul says. In other words, "Far be it from us" or in the words of my

mother when she was angry at her three boys, "Over my dead body!" You get the point, Paul was serious in his language. Of course we are not going to abuse the grace of God. It is abundantly good, but it is not a license to sin. It is not an open door to do whatever we want to do.

He tells us that this is the abundance of God's grace, but this has led to what has become known as "antinomianism." And this specific term can be used both as a secular and a sacred term. In the church, as a sacred term, antinomianism is the belief that the abundance of God's grace cancels out the code of the written moral law. Antinomianism is the belief that the abundance and the goodness of God's grace cancels out, wipes away, or clears away the code of the written moral law. In other words, it looks like this: if God forgives you of your sin, He doesn't hold you accountable to forgive others of their sins. That's only something you receive, but not something you're required to give. Thereby completely eradicating Jesus' own words in Matthew chapter 6, verse 14 when He says, "If your Heavenly Father has forgiven you of your sins, therefore forgive others of their sins."

God, in His abundant grace, showers us with His presence, but don't abuse it - it's not a license to sin. You are alive today, not only because God has showered you in His grace (and He has and He continues to), but because He cancels the debt of your sin by uniting your life to His death, verse 5, "If we had been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."

Anyone who has been dead to their sin has been freed from their sin. You know what? If you want to truly live, you have to fully die. I heard a story of a Sunday school teacher who was teaching a lesson on God's grace and salvation. And at the end of the unit, the Sunday school teacher gathered the children together and said, "Alright, boys and girls, if I do all of these good things in the

church: I clean up and I do this and I serve here and I serve as an usher and a lector and I do all these good things in the church, will I go to heaven?" The kids, with a smirk on their face, shouted, "No, you won't go to heaven if you do all those good things!" Now she goes on, "But what if I go home and I make my husband the greatest meal that he has ever had, and I feed the children, and I even go outside and help my husband with the yard work and do all these things around the house and serve here and do this and do that. Will I be saved? Will I go to heaven?" And once again, resolutely in their heart, the kids said, "No, you will not go to heaven!" She got really serious and looked at all the kids and she said, "Well, how do I get to heaven?" And this little boy in the back raised his hand really proud, and he said in a loud voice, "You've gotta be dead!"

Wow, he got the lesson! You've got to be dead. You see, you are alive today because Jesus cancels the dead of your sin by uniting your life to His death. If you want to truly live, it begins by fully dying.

You see, salvation is simply that: it's receiving God's love; it's receiving God's forgiveness; it's receiving God's mercy; it's receiving God's redemption; it's receiving the finished work of Jesus Christ. There is nothing you or I have to do to receive it, but open up our hearts and respond to the voice of the Holy Spirit. And we may have drifted, even ourselves. Maybe it's not a loved one, maybe it's not a son or a daughter, maybe it's our own life. We have chosen to walk away from our baptisms, but I have good news for you today - the Lord has His sight on you and He is calling you to Himself. It's the abundance of God's grace and mercy that we're talking about today. And there's nothing you have to do to earn it or to merit it. It's simply a gift of God's goodness.

He unites your life to His death so that you can truly live. Jesus showers you in His abundant goodness today. He cancels the debt of your sin by uniting your life to His death. And finally, He raises you up to newness of life in His name, verse 4, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that,

just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.”

Dead to what? Dead to your plans; dead to your agenda; dead to your ideologies; dead to your worldview; dead to yourself. And when you die to yourself, you are united to the death of Jesus Christ. And when you are united to the death of Jesus Christ, you are united to the life of Jesus Christ, whereby He calls you His very own: His son, His daughter.

You are His today and you are alive today because in the waters of Holy Baptism, Jesus showers you with His abundant grace. Jesus cancels the debt of your sin, and my sin, all people's sin, when they confess their sin before the Lord. And He unites your life with His death. And Jesus raises you up to newness of life, so that you can live right here, right now, in God's abundance right here today.

Are you living in the abundant life that Jesus Christ laid down His life for you to receive? I'm not talking about a life that's going through the motions. I'm not talking about a life that lives from paycheck to paycheck. I'm not talking about a life that's overcome by the situation of Covid-19 around us that seems to be getting worse. I'm not talking about the racial injustice, and the problems of our politics and the world that seem to be getting ever greater and more significant.

I'm talking about a life that stands in the presence of Jesus Christ that is not affected by the circumstances around us; that is not affected by what happens outside of us. But that we can say in our heart of hearts today that God, in His abundant glory, God in His abundant provision, has poured out His abundant grace upon me, that nothing can hinder God's love from coming in.

You don't have to be affected by all the things happening around you. You don't have to be triggered by what someone says to you that offends you. You can drop to your knees in humble prayer and say, “God, if it wasn't for your

grace, if it wasn't for your mercy, Jesus, there would be no hope for me." That is the abundance that Jesus Christ has for you today.

Today, you are alive because in the waters of Holy Baptism, God claimed your life and He poured out His Holy Spirit upon you. He united your life to His death so that you might be raised to new life with Him, so that today you might say, "I am alive."

Amen