

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

June 28, 2026

Text: Romans 7:1-13

*“Free to Belong to Another”*

Do you have any idea what you got into when you were baptized? It is easy to overlook that sacrament; for many of us it happened a long time ago. But Scripture, and especially Paul’s letter to the Romans, has a lot to say about the ongoing importance of baptism in the life of faith. Let’s listen to what the Holy Spirit wants to teach us about baptism in today’s epistle reading.

Today we heard the first paragraphs of the seventh chapter of Romans, but at that point, we were actually in the middle of a discussion that really got going in chapters three and four. There the apostle preaches that all people are natural-born sinners, yet God graciously gave Jesus, His Son, to live and die for all sinners – you and me included. Because of Christ’s death for us, God declares us to be forgiven, righteous, justified, and holy by grace. God promises us that this is true, and we experience its truth by trusting His Word. By faith in God’s grace in Jesus, we stand righteous before God, filled with His love as an ongoing gift of the Holy Spirit, and able to live with joyful faith in Him even when we suffer trouble, opposition, and doubts in life, because God has promised that He has justified us by His grace in Jesus forever.

But we have a way of misunderstanding God’s promise that His grace sets us free from sin and death. We comprehend neither the depths of our

sin nor its terrible work in our lives. When Paul declares us free from sin and death through the death of Christ, we think, “Great, since Jesus has set me free, I can do what I want!” Right? No!

Why not? Paul begins to tell us in chapter six. “Doing what we want in life” is still sin. It is putting our desires above God’s for us. And guess what, we have died to that kind of living. What was that? We have died to sin? Really? When? How? When we were baptized: *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death”* (Romans 6:3)? Well, I guess not, if we are still thinking of freedom in selfish and idolatrous ways. But it is still true. *“We were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too, might live a new life”* (6:4).

What did we get into when we were baptized? We got into death, Christ’s death. We got into Christ Himself, who died for the sins of the world and was raised from the dead on the third day, so baptism also makes us to share in Jesus’ resurrection and in a new life lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism into Christ’s death sets us free from sin, and that is great news because sin kills us, for eternity. Baptism sets us free from sin’s slavery, and it makes us God’s slaves, people who trust God as our Loving Master and gladly give ourselves to live for Him each day.

Now when we talk about serving God, where do we turn to know what that means? Where does God tell us what He wants us to do? In His

commandments, His law. But guess what? When we were baptized, we were also set free from the law! That is what today's reading promises.

But again, that freedom is easily misunderstood, so Paul leads us away from those pitfalls with a discussion about marriage. Which of God's laws defines and governs marriage? Don't worry about its number, but what does the commandment say? "You shall not commit adultery." This law teaches us that when a man and woman are united in marriage, it is for life. It binds couples together until a spouse dies. Death ends the marriage and frees the surviving spouse from the law that governs it, making it possible for that person to re-marry without sin.

Guess what baptism does for us? It unites us with Jesus, who died for us and lives forevermore. We might even say that it marries us to Him. With Him and in Him, we died to the power passed on to us from Adam – sin. And in Christ, sin died too. Christ was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:20). He bore all the world's sin on the cross and died, so sin died with Him. But Jesus was raised from the dead, and He declares us forgiven and free to live with Him apart from sin and death: "*Peace be with you*" (John 20:19)!

Baptism into Jesus has brought our marriage-like bond with sin to an end! Without faith in Jesus, we were lost and condemned sinners, unable to deliver ourselves from our trespasses. Talk about "the old ball and chain"! We tried to deny our sins. We could come up with lame excuses

for them, like “the devil made me do it!”, but the law always contradicted us. “You are a sinner, and you always will be one!” The law never stops seeing us as sinners and accusing us. But now, because we are baptized and believe in Jesus, we are free in Him, and no law condemns us before God, since sin has died in Christ, our Lord. *“Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”*

When we were baptized, we got into a new life of faith in Jesus in which we share in His freedom from sin and from the law’s condemnation. Now, instead of being simply bound to sin and condemned by the law, we are united with Christ to live as forgiven children of God now and forever. The Holy Spirit has given us the new nature that is like that of our Lord’s, and He strengthens that in us as we listen to His Word and receive His forgiving grace through faith. And the Spirit helps us, through faith, to think thoughts, speak words, and do works that glorify God by blessing our neighbours.

But are we really free from sin and from the law’s pointing finger? Why did we confess ourselves to be sinful and unclean just minutes ago? Baptism has broken our inherited union with sin and has joined us to Christ in a Spirit-given union; that is God’s gracious promise. He does not lie, so in Him, we must trust.

For the remainder of our earthly lives though, we still bear that mark of fallen Adam. His evil, stubborn nature clings to us, and the law still makes its case against us. Its commands always awaken our consciences to our sin, and they will even stir up sin within us. *“For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.”*

But fear not! Because we are baptized into Christ, we are free from sin and from the law’s accusations. We will not die but live and proclaim God’s saving works for us forever (Psalm 118:17)! When the law accuses us, we can freely and honestly to plead guilty, for our baptism into Christ always sets His death and resurrection over against our sin and shame. God declares us forgiven, just, righteous, and holy, for He sees us living in union with His Son. We belong to Jesus, God’s Son, not to sin any longer! Trusting in this grace, we rejoice, we praise the great love of our God, we proudly bear His name, and we live as His Spirit-filled servants. On the day of resurrection, the freedom in which we live, now by faith, will be seen in its full glory by all for eternity.

What did we get into when we were baptized? We got into life with Jesus, our Beloved Lord, life united with Him forever. Amen.