

Follow-Through On Forgiveness I Acknowledge That By Holy Baptism.

Text: Rom 6:3-4

Suggested Hymns:

277, 828, 279, 291, 513

- 1) I Have Entered Into The State Of Forgiveness
- 2) I Have Been United With All Who Share
The One Faith And The One Lord
- 3) Has Set Me Into Action In
A Life Of Continual Giving

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 6:3-4, ³ *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* ⁴ *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are continuing our series on the Nicene Creed. Part 15 focuses on the words, *I acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.*

The complacency and the self-satisfaction with which some Christians can regard their own demonstration of the forgiven life is nothing short of disturbing.

We may not say in so many words, *“Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”*¹ as St. Paul quotes the thoughts of the Roman Christians. But what does our follow-through on our forgiveness show in our own lives?

What exactly are we thinking of, when we speak together as a Christian congregation, the words of the Nicene Creed, *“I acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins”*?

Does such an acknowledgment indicate that we believe that God desires nothing else from us, than the opportunity to follow us around, wiping away the spilt milk over which we shed a few sad tears?

Do we give no thought to the follow-through on our forgiveness — that God has high hopes that we would begin to grow up and go and spill milk no more? Your fathers and mothers hoped that you will soon be able to balance your glass without spilling, and then grow up to drive the car without recklessness, and so on — does not our heavenly Father hope for maturity in our forgiven life?

Consider also the matter of our corporateness in this confession. “*I acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins*” — surely the follow-through on our forgiveness makes us unable to think of ourselves as the only ones who have been baptised.

We have been baptised into the family of God — there is but one Baptism, one Lord, and one faith. Does not the awareness of this truth affect the follow-through on our forgiveness?

Just exactly what is the result of our Baptism for the forgiveness of sins? Does our follow-through mean only that we “acknowledge” there is such a thing as Holy Baptism? Or does our forgiveness mean to us, a change as radical as the very resurrection from the death of sin? And does this realisation of what we should be, shame us for what we have been?

Let us follow through on these thoughts about your Baptism, and seek the Holy Spirit’s strength to follow-through on your forgiveness. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. I Acknowledge That By Holy Baptism I Have Entered Into The State Of Forgiveness.

Delivery is necessary for new birth. Some psychologists suggest that the struggle to be born causes after-effects in one’s life that are never quite outgrown. It is a struggle - a child must be delivered from the confinement of the womb in order to live.

The struggle to be “born again” involves far greater difficulties and far greater dangers. When the psalmist speaks of being “*brought forth in iniquity*” and “*conceived in sin,*”² he is describing the dreadful situation in which all people now enter into life.

Our problem is not simply a matter of sinning, which means we are “*out of line*” and have broken all of the Ten Commandments — our matter is sin. We

are sin, and by nature we are turned against God and against our fellowman. When a doctor discovers that the embryo has turned in the womb and a breech birth is to be expected, he knows that his work is infinitely more difficult.

But when God points out to us how by nature we are turned against Him and have turned our back on our fellowmen, we can but acknowledge that we could never be turned, except by God, and never be born except by His intervention. Our “new birth” must be a “delivery” indeed, and we must be delivered by some force outside of ourselves.

God endured the pain of our delivery. If a father would stand by the hospital bed of his wife just before she is rolled off to the delivery room and would say, *“It’s too dangerous. I can’t let you risk it. I’m going to take your place,”* what answer could there be but a smile? It would be a smile that would say, *“Thanks for the thought, but it just can’t be that way. No one can take my place.”*

When God Himself stood by our side and said, *“I am going to take your place,”* the devil thought it a big laugh, and we - we could neither believe it, nor did we really care about it.

But God did it! What could not be, was — is — and God Himself has indeed taken our place, and we are delivered through Him. Jesus Christ, God’s own Son, took our nature upon Himself and was born into life in our place. With humanity added to His divinity He was conceived by the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born in Bethlehem and lived out His life as man’s substitute.

When something impossible happens, how can it be explained to minds that can understand only the possible? If a husband could take his wife’s place, and did take his wife’s place, could he ever make plain how he managed it? And we think that this is impossible: that God Himself should take our place under the Law, take our place under the divine judgment against sin which meant punishment and eternal death. How is this to be explained to us?

*“Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows.”*³ These words of Scripture help us realise that all that sin brought tumbling down about our ears God has borne for us. *“Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.”* These words make clear that the horror and utter rejection of sin and the sinner which a holy God must inevitably feel, God turned against Himself and

bore for us. Indeed, ***“The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”***

By Baptism deliverance is ours. It is through Holy Baptism that this costly delivery made possible by our Lord Jesus Christ becomes “free delivery” for us. This is the clear point in our text, ***“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ‘Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.’”*** We move on into the happy ending because Jesus bore the awful things the curse of sin had in store for us.

In a Hollywood movie the hero carries on until the plot calls for him to endure some terrible punishment or risk his life in some dangerous feat. Then the *stunt man* takes his place. He dresses himself in such a way that no one can tell that he is a different person, and then with his know-how and courage he risks his life performing all that the scenario calls for. And when the risk is over and the danger passed, the hero fades into the close-up once again and goes on to the happy ending.

This is a somewhat poor comparison for the divine intervention, but how are we to comprehend the impossible which God has done, and suddenly made possible to us by such a simple act as Holy Baptism? Water was poured over our head three times ***“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”*** and by the working Word of God suddenly all that Jesus Christ accomplished for men by His living and dying and rising again becomes our very own. With all the danger passed, we move on to the happy ending.

We were sinners moving on through life rebelling against God and sure to know the crushing result of rebellion; and suddenly Jesus Christ, looking just like us, a Man living among men and for men, slips into our place and lives life as it should be lived, dies death as it must be died because of sin, and then rises to live again, triumphant over all that death and Satan tried to wreak on Him. And what Jesus did He did for the whole world.

Now time passes. We are made living by being born, but we are really dead and dying in sinfulness. Then comes our Baptism, this washing of water by the Word, and quickly Christ’s death becomes our death, His resurrection our rising

to life. We have gone around all the punishment and horror of sin and come back into life on the other side of the resurrection, born again by water and the Holy Spirit.

This is what we “*acknowledge*” about our Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Our Baptism has put us on the other side of sin and its punishment, has put us beyond the resurrection into a new condition of life. We are forgiven, but more — we are in a state of forgiveness.

St. Paul continues stressing that point, “*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,* ⁶ *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.* ⁷ *For he who has died has been freed from sin.*

⁸ *Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,* ⁹ *knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.* ¹⁰ *For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.* ¹¹ *Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* “⁴

What Jesus Christ did, He did once for all, and did for all. We sin and sin and sin, and we do need forgiveness over and over again. But what our Lord has done for us, and what our Baptism has done for us, is to put us into a new kind of life, the forgiven life. We have been put through the death for sin that Christ died for us, and we have passed through the resurrection that God gave to His Son for our justification — and we now live the new life, the forgiven life.

Therefore we acknowledge that there is *one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins*.

2. I Acknowledge That By This One Baptism

I Have Been United With All Who Share The One Faith And The One Lord.

St. Paul spelled this out in Ephesians 4:4-6, ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

United with all people. There is no person anywhere in the world that we can ever meet whom we should not see as a brother. Christ died for all people, and Christ instituted a Baptism that was designed for all. We read in Matthew 28:19-20, ¹⁹ *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰ *“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”*

There are no people for whom the dying and the rising again have not already been accomplished. There are sadly many people who have not heard of it or who, having heard of it, have not cared and have turned away. But they remain our brothers — brothers not listening, not caring, but the more to be cared for and sought after as a result. We “acknowledge” this and ought it not move us to *“do good to all”*?⁵

And ought it not move us even more to do good especially *“to those who are of the household of faith”*? Did you see a baptised brother of the household of faith in the little boy you failed to help yesterday? Does your daughter —who does forget and sometimes does the wrong things deliberately and maddeningly — does she remind you of you?

Do you see the family resemblance in sin, but even more in the household of faith? Do you acknowledge one Baptism, theirs and yours? And do you see that it makes you one — one in the household of faith?

Whom did you see this morning over the breakfast table who kept telling you to eat your rolled oats? Your mother and your father are also your brother and your sister — by your Baptism you are all children of God. It should make a difference to us, to the way we live with one another, the way we like one another, the way we put ourselves out for one another, to remember that we have been united by our Baptism into one family.

This Baptism that has united us has been a Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness came from God, and it comes from God to each sinner who believes and is baptised. The hymnist writes, *“blest be the tie that binds.”*⁶ Surely we cannot withhold forgiveness from those whom God has already forgiven!

And surely we cannot treat as strangers anyone who claims Jesus as their best Friend our best Friend, can we? It is all part of our follow-through on our forgiveness.

Therefore we acknowledge that there is *one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins!*

3. I Acknowledge That This Baptism Of Forgiveness Has Set Me Into Action In A Life Of Continual Giving.

This is clearly the follow-through of my forgiveness. My Lord gave Himself for me. By Baptism I am made His. Now I must give myself to the Lord and to others. I acknowledge this when I acknowledge my Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

When a criminal acknowledges his crime but shows no sorrow for having done it, we are horrified. When we read of a murderer who confesses, “*Yes, I beat the man to death —so what?*” we shudder and say, “*Something is wrong with that person’s mind.*” He acknowledges what has happened, but he does not follow through with even an admission of guilt.

When a Christian acknowledges one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, what then? When we do, what then? Is it not more horrifying if we do not follow-through with the life of repentance, a life that has turned back to the God, who made and redeemed it?

A man who acknowledges a woman to be his wife does not simply say, “*Yes, she’s it.*” Instead he takes her into his home and with her takes on both the responsibilities and the joys of married life. Only the follow-through of acknowledgment brings the blessing and the joy.

St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, ¹² *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.* ¹³ *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*

And then he goes on to describe how the body takes care of its members without question. But for the climax of his description of how each member

should care for each other we read in 1 Corinthians 13:13, ¹³ *And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

And when he describes love, he gives us the true follow-through of forgiveness, ⁴ *Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;* ⁵ *does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;* ⁶ *does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;* ⁷ *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*⁷

We know this kind of love in Christ Jesus. While we were His enemies, He gave Himself for us for our forgiveness. The two words are very close together in our Lord's case — giving and forgiveness.

They must be very close together in our lives, although their order is reversed — forgiveness means giving. All that Jesus has done for us is both the power and the example of all that we should give out to others. We are never done with the exchange in this life.

Repeatedly we fall and must ask again for His forgiveness. What He has given for us we can then give for others. He gives us Himself and enables us to give ourselves for others. To help us know that the exchange can continually go on, He gives us His body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. When we receive Him, we can give ourselves.

Today we have seen examples of the follow-through of forgiveness as a result of our Baptism. This is our acknowledgment of the *one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins*. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 6:1

² Psalm 51:5

³ Isaiah 53:4

⁴ Romans 6:5-11

⁵ Galatians 6:10

⁶ Hymn 797

⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7