



Sermon by Synod Minister Seyward Ask

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Our scripture reading comes from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 6, beginning with the first verse:

¹Should we continue in sin in order that grace may increase? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, so we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed^[a] from sin. ⁸But if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thank be to God.

I wonder if you've ever had one of those moments where everything feels unsteady. Maybe it's a personal struggle. A difficult diagnosis. A relationship that's changed. A job transition. A loss that leaves you wondering what comes next. Or maybe it's the larger world that feels unsteady. It doesn't take much these days. Turn on the news for five minutes and you can find yourself overwhelmed. Wars continue. Political divisions seem deeper than ever. Communities wrestle with questions of justice and belonging. Even the institutions we once trusted can begin to feel shaky.

There are moments when it feels like the ground beneath our feet is constantly shifting. And when life feels unstable, we start looking for something solid. Something dependable. Something we can stand on.

That's why I find these words from Romans to be such a powerful text. Because Paul isn't offering wishful thinking. He's not saying, "Everything will work out," or "Just stay positive." Instead, Paul points us toward something deeper. He points us toward hope. Not optimism. Hope.

And there's a difference. Optimism says, "I think things might get better." Hope says, "No matter what happens, God is still present." Optimism depends on circumstances. Hope depends on God. Paul reminds us that our hope is grounded in something that has already happened: the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Now, I'll admit that this isn't exactly an easy text. Paul starts talking about dying with Christ, being buried with Christ, being raised with Christ. It's the kind of passage that can feel a little confusing at first. But underneath all the theological language is a simple and powerful truth. Paul is telling us that resurrection isn't just something Jesus experienced. It's something we participate in.

Listen again to what he says: "We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

Notice the tense. Not someday. Not eventually. Not only after we die. Now. Newness of life begins here. Today. In this moment. Through baptism, Paul says, we are

connected to Christ's story. His story becomes our story. Which means death never gets the final word. Not for Jesus. Not for us. Not for this world that God loves.

And that is where hope takes root. Not in denying hardship. Not in pretending everything is fine. But in trusting that God is always bringing life where others only see endings. I think that's important because many of us were taught to think about resurrection primarily as something that happens after death. And certainly Christians believe that God's promise extends beyond this life. But resurrection is bigger than that.

Resurrection happens whenever new life emerges from places of despair. Resurrection happens whenever healing follows brokenness. Whenever forgiveness overcomes resentment. Whenever justice begins to replace oppression. Whenever communities choose compassion over fear. Whenever people discover they are loved exactly as God created them to be. Resurrection isn't only future. It's present. It's happening all around us. Sometimes quietly. Sometimes unexpectedly. Sometimes in ways we almost miss.

Years ago, a church member told me about cleaning out her mother's home after her mother had died. She described how emotionally exhausting it was. Every room held memories. Every drawer contained reminders of someone she loved.

In the middle of that process she found a small box filled with handwritten notes. Notes her mother had written over decades—prayers, words of encouragement, letters she'd never sent, reflections on faith. This woman said that reading those notes felt like hearing her mother's voice again.

Not because death had disappeared. The grief was still real. But in that moment she realized that love had not ended. Her mother's life was still shaping people. Still blessing people. Still bearing fruit. Something new was growing in the midst of loss. That doesn't erase death. But it reminds us that death never gets the last word. That's resurrection hope.

And that's what Paul wants us to know. The powers of death are real. But they do not have the final say. The powers of fear are real. But they do not have the final say. The powers of hatred, injustice, violence, and despair are real. But they do not have the final say. Because God is always at work bringing life. That's the promise of Easter. And it's the promise of baptism.

In our Lutheran tradition, we often talk about baptism as something that happens daily. Martin Luther encouraged people to begin each day remembering their baptism. Not because we get baptized over and over again, but because every day we need to remember who we are. We belong to God. We are beloved. We are forgiven. We are part of Christ's resurrection story. Every single day.

And that's something we need to hear. Because there are so many voices trying to tell us who we are. Some voices tell us we're not enough. Some tell us we're defined by our mistakes. Some tell us we're only valuable if we're successful. Some tell us to fear people who are different from us. Some tell us to give up hope altogether. But through baptism God speaks a different word.

God says: You are my beloved child. You are claimed. You are cherished. You are enough. You are part of something bigger than yourself. And nothing—not failure, not fear, not death itself—can separate you from my love.

That identity becomes the ground beneath our feet. That's what keeps us steady when life feels uncertain. Not our accomplishments. Not our certainty. Not our ability to have all the answers. But God's unshakable love. And from that place of security, something remarkable happens. We become people who carry hope into the world. Notice that Paul doesn't say we are raised merely to feel better. He says we are raised to "walk in newness of life." In other words, resurrection changes how we live.

If death doesn't have the final word, then we don't have to live in fear. If God's love is stronger than death, then we can take risks for justice. If God's grace is real, then we can practice forgiveness. If resurrection is true, then we can choose compassion even when cynicism feels easier. If God is creating new life, then we can join that work.

Hope isn't passive; it's active.

Hope plants trees whose shade we may never sit under. Hope welcomes strangers and feeds hungry neighbors and speaks up for those whose voices are ignored. Hope keeps showing up and keeps loving and keeps believing that God is not finished with this world.

Paul is inviting us to live as resurrection people. To be grounded in hope. Not because life is easy. Not because we have certainty about everything. But because Jesus has gone through death and emerged on the other side. And because through baptism, that story has become our story too.

The world will always give us reasons to despair. But the gospel keeps giving us reasons to hope. The tomb is empty. Love is stronger than death. God is still creating new life. And we are invited to participate in that new life every single day.

So when the ground feels shaky, remember where your hope is rooted. Not in circumstances. Not in success. Not in having all the answers. But in the God who brings life out of death. The God who raises Jesus. The God who claims us in baptism. The God who is even now renewing the world. That is solid ground. That is resurrection. That is hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.