

January 7, 2018 Baptism of Our Lord
Romans 6:1-11 "Baptized into Citizenship"
A sermon offered by Lutheran Family Service.

If someone asked for your citizenship papers, could you find them quickly? I have mine right here. [Have your Baptismal certificate . . . if you can find it!] [Read from the certificate.]
"This certifies that [Your Name] was baptized at [Name of church] on [Date]. Etc."

Today we commemorate the Baptism of our Lord. A good time to remember God's great love for us. He sent His Son to stand in line with sinners on the banks of the Jordan. He sent His Son to identify with sinners like you and me and to take our place, even to the point of death on the cross.

It is also a good time to remember our own baptisms and to be reminded that when we were baptized "into Christ Jesus," our citizenship changed. Paul says to the Ephesians, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). And to the Philippians, "But our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). So, how does this happen? What kind of vetting process do we need to go through to go from aliens to citizens of heaven? None really. We get splashed with simple water, water connected to a powerful Word, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We get splashed with simple water and drowned into the death of Jesus. We are connected to the promise in our text, "For the death he died he died to sin, once for all . . ." (10). He died for you, for me, for all. He paid the awful penalty for our sin so we would never have to make such a payment. We get splashed with simple water and buried with Jesus. We are connected to the promise in our text, ". . . just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (4).

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Now it is important to note here that this is not talking about our bodily resurrection from the dead that will occur when Jesus returns. Jesus' resurrection certainly assures us of that. Paul makes this very clear in 1 Corinthians 15 where he speaks of Jesus being the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Because we were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection we can live in the certain hope of our own resurrection on that last day. We refer to this as the "second resurrection." So, what is the first resurrection? That is what is being described in our text.

Our text describes our spiritual resurrection when the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in the waters of Baptism. It is not a resurrection to live forever in paradise. It is a resurrection to live right here and now in Christ, to walk with Him "in newness of life" (4), to live considering ourselves "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (11). This is Paul's whole point. He established the wonderful Good News that we are justified freely by the boundless grace of God in chapter 5. Now he sets out to make it clear that this does not mean we can do as we please. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (1-2). In short, our Baptism not only enables us to *be* citizens of Heaven with the joyful hope that we are on our way home, it enables us to *live* as citizens of Heaven while we are on our way home.

What does living as citizens of Heaven look like? Two things to consider in answer to that question. First it means living under what we call God's "Kingdom of the Right Hand." This is God's rule of grace in and over His people, His citizens. He exercises this rule through His Church. As citizens of the "right hand kingdom," we are to be active members of His body in a

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local congregation. We are to regularly receive His gifts of grace through the Divine service where His Word is proclaimed and His sacraments administered. It means daily contrition and repentance of our sins. It means loving and serving our fellow citizens who are brothers and sisters in Christ. It means speaking God's truth in love, admonishing one another when needed so that we many all grow up in unity under our Head, Jesus Christ. It means taking seriously our Lord's command to make disciples of all nations and actively supporting the church's efforts to do so. But all of this does not happen in a vacuum. And that brings us to the second thing to consider in our calling to walk in newness of life as baptized citizens of heaven.

Let me tell you about the Pilar Monks. This was a group of monks In the Middle Ages who built platforms on pillars to lift them off the earth. It was an attempt to live and meditate and pray apart from the world. But that is not what baptized citizens of heaven are called to do. While we are not *of* the world, we do live *in* the world. Living in the world means we also live under the "Kingdom of God's Left Hand". In this Kingdom, God rules through the governing authorities, which, Paul reminds us in Romans 13, God Himself establishes. So, as citizens of Heaven we are also citizens of our country and state and communities. We are to obey these governing authorities as long as they do not command us to do something contrary to the will of God. But our call is to more than mere passive obedience.

As baptized citizens of Heaven who live in the God's right hand kingdom, we are called by some other names that imply action in God's left hand kingdom. Peter says we are "peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9 KJV), a special people, people who are different. Jesus tells us that His citizens in the right hand kingdom are to be "salt" and "light" in the left hand kingdom

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(Matthew 5:13 &14). Paul writes that as those “strong in the Lord,” we are to stand *for* God’s truth and *against* the “schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10). As “children of light,” we are to bear “the fruit of light” and expose “the works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:9-11).

Now there are some—maybe some of you here today—who say that the church and Christians should not be involved in politics and government, the things of the left hand kingdom. But from what we have heard in God’s Word today, not only are Christians permitted to be involved in the left hand kingdom, we are *compelled* to be involved! Our influence is needed perhaps more than ever before.

Oh, to be sure, there is a need to be cautious. We who are citizens of Heaven have no business trying to establish a Christian government, some kind of “state church” where people are obligated to believe. Our country and our own church body were founded by people trying to escape that very thing. Nor do we have any business telling people where they should stand on political issues. Christians may have different views on things like health care or tax reform or immigration policies.

However, there are some things being debated as political issues that are really spiritual issues, truth issues. For example, marriage, human sexuality, and the sanctity of human life at both its beginning and end are issues to which God’s Word speaks very directly. Did you know that assisted-suicide bills have been introduced in the Iowa legislature for the past two years? Be assured it will come up again. Bills restricting abortion and defunding those who perform them were passed last year. More bills affirming God’s gift of life will be introduced this year. Lutheran Family Service (LFS) actively informs legislators on such issues and supports those who

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favor protection for human life whether in the womb or near death. Such issues challenge God's Lordship over life and death and put man in God's place. Christians should not have different views on these issues. These issues should be addressed in God's right hand Kingdom based on God's Word of Law and Gospel. This in turn should motivate God's people to bring their influence to bear on these issues in God's left hand Kingdom.

So, what does that look like? Well, first let me tell you what it does not look like! Screaming and yelling, waving your Bible and quoting Bible verses out of context, condemning to eternal Hell-fire those who disagree with you generally will not get you very far. That does not mean you should leave your Bible behind. It is the basis for what you do and it is okay that people know where your convictions come from. There even may be opportunity to share the Gospel with others. But our manner should reflect the love of Him who rules in both kingdoms.

As citizens of the right hand kingdom living in the left-hand kingdom, we should be aware of when these issues that attack God and His truth are being dealt with in the public square. (LFS) keeps a vigilant watch at the capitol when it comes to such issues. They communicate what they learn through their E-news list. Being on that list will help keep you informed.

Then we can all pray about these issues. We can pray for those who represent us especially now as a new legislative session begins. We can pray for those who suffer persecution—and believe me this happens—when they stand up for God-given truths and values. We can let those who represent us know where we stand and why. We can thank them when they do take a stand for truth and encourage them in doing so. If able, we can be present

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at rallies, debates, public forums, and other venues where such issues are discussed. We can inform others about the importance of these spiritual issues and encourage their participation. We can support LFS and their efforts to promote and educate on these truths. For too long the world has influenced what the church does and says. It's time to do what we can to reverse this flow of influence.

So, I encourage you to go home and find your citizenship papers, your baptismal certificate. Put it on your dresser or by your desk or on your kitchen counter. Let it remind you that when you were "baptized into Christ" your citizenship changed. You've been splashed and forgiven and cleansed. You are citizens of heaven, citizens of God's right hand kingdom walking in "newness of life." Let your citizenship papers remind you that you also live this new life in God's left hand kingdom as citizens of this country. Our prayer is that God would use us to influence public policy so that His truths are fostered and upheld to the glory of His name and for the good of our state and country. Amen.