

"Keep the Change"

Text: Romans 6:1-11

"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." Amen. (1 Peter 5:10)

Dear Fellow Christians:

It's pretty much the promise of every candidate who runs for office, and since someone or other *always* seems to be running for office, it is therefore a promise we seem to hear almost daily: "*Change*." We get the idea, of course. Candidates have to promise something we don't have, or promise to correct an existing problem, or no one would bother to vote for them. So they promise that if we will just elect them they will usher in that magical, cure-all they call "change." We've learned the hard way that "change" isn't always all it's cracked up to be. Change isn't a one-way street. Change can be good, but change can also be very bad.

There are also times when things seem to get so bad that the general populace will support change of any kind. "*Anything*," they foolishly reason, "*would be better than what we have now*." History is full of examples where citizens opted for change because they were convinced things couldn't get any worse, only to find that things could actually get *much* worse – *infinitely* worse. The Confederacy opted for change in 1861 and got 4 years of bloody civil war, change that destroyed forever their way of life. Germany opted for change in 1933 and got Nazism. America opted for change in 2015 and got gay marriage.

Clearly there are few situations in life where things just couldn't get any worse – where change *of any kind* is preferable to the status quo and therefore absolutely and unquestionable necessary. Of the top of my head I can think of only one such situation, which was recognized and addressed by God himself. The Apostle Paul spoke of that critical need for change in our text for this morning, found recorded in his Letter to the Romans, the Sixth Chapter:

^{ESV} Romans 6:1-11 *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore 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 walk in newness of life. ⁵ ¶ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly*

be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

So far the very words of our God. What comfort is inspired by the knowledge that these words are true and right in every regard, and therefore worthy of our intense study and meditation. That we might gain the full benefit of these words through our study this morning, so we pray, "*Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.*" Amen.

Did you recognize the change that our text outlined as absolutely necessary? The problem, according to our text, was that mankind was "*enslaved to sin*." Hell is the only possible destination for anyone enslaved by sin, so our condition absolutely qualified not just as "bad," but as intolerably bad. Not only was mankind enslaved to sin (and therefore existing in unbelief) we had no understanding of the problem and therefore no will to resist. Talk about the worst of all worlds. We were enslaved to sin, headed for hell, didn't care, and couldn't do anything about it even if we did.

God himself knew that change was absolutely vital if mankind had any hope for survival. The "change" he brought was Jesus Christ. Then, knowing as he did that man couldn't even do his part to accept Jesus as their Savior and live, he gave us that simple and yet incredibly powerful gift called baptism. God himself promised to work faith in the human heart when we applied simple water and connected it to God's Word. This absolutely changed everything. Satan didn't have a chance.

Yet as in any epic struggle, just when you think that one side has gained an insurmountable advantage – some edge or power that would surely guarantee success – the other side counters with some valiant effort or unforeseen strategy and the struggle continues. Such was the case also in the ultimate struggle between God and Satan over the souls of men. When God established baptism, first with John the Baptist and later with all of the New Testament disciples, he gave to the Church a most formidable weapon. Again, how simple, and yet how powerfully complex was this great gift to mankind. Through this gift amazing things could be accomplished – spectacular, supernatural

wonders. Souls could be rescued from their *enslavement to sin* and placed instead on the shining path of life eternal. When God gave such a simple and powerful weapon to mankind, the depths of hell itself must have been shaken by the raw power and potency of this simple sacrament. Surely baptism, powered by the Word of God, would act as a terrible scythe that would decimate the ranks of Satan's legions.

How then is it possible that such a powerful, life-changing tool has fallen into such disrepair? How is it possible that something so great, so powerful, so wonderful has been more or less discarded as an outdated religious relic by our modern society? We ought not be surprised. In any such struggle (where one side fights with the fury of the damned) if we have learned anything at all it is that the devil will spare no effort in this epic confrontation. We should have known that he would hurl himself against this great weapon, this humble miracle of baptism, with all of his considerable fury, wrath and cunning.

And hurl himself he did. What is more, his success has been nothing short of stupefying. Where God intended the sacrament to be a pure and powerful working of the gospel, Satan has succeeded in convincing those both inside and outside of the Christian Church of everything *but* the truth. Countless millions now regard baptism as a good work that man does to earn a spiritual benefit. Others believe that it is just another obligation or legal requirement (law) that man must fulfill before he can be considered worthy of heaven in the eyes of his God. And those are just the attacks from within the Church. The world condescendingly dismisses Christian baptism altogether as quaint mythology for the simple-minded – a cute little custom with all the charm and power of four leaf clovers and dream catchers.

Baptism, as God himself describes it in his Holy Word, is "*the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*" Because of the Word of God connected to the simple water, Baptism represents a power beyond the comprehension of mortal man. Its very simplicity, however, belies its great effectiveness. This too ought not surprise us. Mankind has always rejected God's simple solutions to even our most debilitating problems – beginning with the gospel itself.

This is certainly part of the devil's strategy. If he can convince mankind that the gospel is too childish to actually work, he will have succeeded in persuading man to slam shut and deadbolt the only door to paradise.

The fact is the gospel in general, and baptism in particular, *are* that simple. God himself is complex beyond our comprehension or imagination, but not

so with the plan he established for our salvation. That plan is simple. Though we rebelled against him by sinning, he sent his only Son to pay our spiritual debt – our *sin* debt. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, paid our debt by first becoming man, then living a perfectly sinless life, and finally by giving that life as a blood sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. God the Father accepted that gift as payment in full for all sins, and he credits that payment to each of us. The credit becomes our personal own the moment the Holy Spirit works saving faith in our hearts. Believing that Jesus has indeed paid for your sins, forgiveness and salvation are yours, fully and completely.

That is where baptism comes into the picture. How does the Holy Spirit create such faith? Through baptism. Though exactly *how* God works the miracle of faith in the human heart is beyond our comprehension, it is enough for us to know that he does, in fact, create such faith. God has chosen to work faith in our hearts through "means." That is, he did not choose to work *directly* (from heaven to heart) but through the divinely inspired words of the Bible (the "means"). "*Faith comes by hearing,*" we read in Romans 10:17, and the message we need to hear is found in our Bibles. In other words, faith comes not directly from heaven, but by hearing the message of the gospel – the very message that is contained in the words of God recorded in the Bible.

Baptism, then, is a simple tool that God gave us for the application of his powerful Word. As Luther put it, "*Without the Word of God you have simple water only – no baptism. With the Word of God, it is baptism; that is, a gracious water of life and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*" Baptism is a *means* whereby even the smallest infant can experience the application of the word of grace – the very power that can and does bring a dead soul to the spiritual life of saving faith. Many are confused as to how an infant can come to faith. The misunderstanding actually lies not in baptism but in faith itself. Man naturally credits himself with coming to faith, imagining that it is some sort of rational acceptance of facts – something apparently therefore beyond the ability of an infant. The miracle of faith, however, is accomplished by the Holy Spirit working through the Word in the heart of man. Sinful man is the *recipient* of this miraculous gift, not the *source* or *provider* of the miracle. Note all the passive verbs throughout our text. The miracle of baptism was not something we did, it was something God did to us – a miracle God himself worked in us.

You and I desperately needed the change that God worked in us – from slavery to freedom, from death to life. That's the sort of change we want to keep, of course, but there's a problem. Our old Adam wants

Scripture Readings

to keep dragging us back to the old ways, and the chain by which it would again be enslaved is sin. That's why Paul in our text takes such great pains to identify the change that has taken place and what it means for God's children. He began with a question: *"How can we who died to sin still live in it?"* That is the change, isn't it? When we were brought to faith we *"died to sin."* Paul then went on to explain the change that has taken place, what he means by telling us that *we died to sin: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* ⁴ *We were buried therefore 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 walk in newness of life.* And he sums up with this conclusion: *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

In effect then the Holy Spirit is here telling us to *keep the change*. The change we have been given is freedom, where once there was only slavery. Where once we could only do those things that pleased Satan, our master (a truly terrifying reality) now the shackles of sin have been broken and we are free to serve the God who created us. No power on earth can drag you back into that loathsome servitude – except you. Satan *can't* do it; God *won't* do it; only you and I have the terrible power to throw away the relationship we now have with our God and to shackle ourselves again to the devil.

How or why would anyone ever do something that ignorant, that stupid? Because there will always remain in us that part that loves sin so much that it willfully blinds itself to the consequences. Because Jesus Christ has broken the power that Satan held over us, you are the only one who can destroy you. How can we possibly survive, when our natural tendency is to ruin everything that we touch? The power to keep the change that God has brought into our lives and to continue in the freedom and life that is now ours must also come from God. The good news is that all the help we need is readily available to us, right there on the pages of our Bibles. The same Word of God that *worked* that necessary and miraculous change in us can and will also *preserve* that change in us. The same power that broke the devil's hold on us can protect and perpetuate the freedom that is now ours. There, in God's Word, is where we learn to "put off the old Adam" and to "put on the new man." There we read the promises of God, like the promise that Paul gave at the end of our text: *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

Go to God's Word, find him there, and there experience the power that will allow you to keep the change that he has given you. Amen.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 43:1-7** But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³ For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. ⁴ Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. ⁵ Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. ⁶ I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

^{ESV} **Luke 3:15-22** As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ ¶ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. ²¹ ¶ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Michael McEnroe, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Suzannah Miller

The First Sunday after Epiphany – January 10, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 301 (Red Hymnal)

"He that Believes and Is Baptized"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 43:1-7) Our First Lesson applies obviously to Israel in the near-term, but ultimately to God's Son, Jesus Christ – who is the heart and soul of the entire Old Testament. The words also apply to God's children today, who are indeed precious in his sight.

Psalm 66 (Supplement page 37) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 3:15-22) Our second lesson refers in passing to the event we commemorate on this Sunday – the baptism of Jesus. Clearly Jesus had no sin, therefore he was not baptized "for the remission of sins" – as we are today baptized. He left us rather with a perfect example, in every way. The fact that Jesus allowed himself to be baptized ought to teach us to treasure this gift and to avail ourselves of the divine power offered there.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 298 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Baptized into Thy Name Most Holy"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 6:1-11 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Keep the Change"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 308 (Red Hymnal)

"Invited Lord, by Boundless Grace"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn 315 (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 298 (Verses 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Baptized into Thy Name Most Holy"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (43) Average (48) Organ Fund (\$15,345)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and Coffee time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Wayne Eichstadt is considering the call to Gethsemane of Spokane, WA. We are in need of delegates to represent our congregation at this summer's West Central Delegate Conference in Jamestown (May 31 -June 2) and at the General CLC Convention in Eau Claire (June 23-26).

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet after the fellowship time this morning. One of the items on the agenda is to make the necessary decisions on a replacement organ. Of the \$22,000 needed, we have currently received \$15,345. If you have plans to contribute toward this fund, please consider doing so this morning, or let a Council member know of your intentions. This information will be very helpful in the decision making process.

No Bible Class Next Sunday – Please note that there will be Sunday School, but no Bible Class, next Sunday as Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town.