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Romans 6:1-11

GOD WANTS US DEAD AND ALIVE

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Have you ever seen one of those old Wild West posters: Wanted: Dead or Alive? There were some pretty bad outlaws out there. The sheriff would send posses out to get the bad guys. Sometimes they were successful, other times not. There were men known as bounty hunters who would go after the criminals. They were to bring these men back to justice one way or another. If they had to kill them, then those people were brought to justice. And if they brought them back alive, these outlaws would be jailed and ultimately hanged for their crimes. It really didn't matter as long as they were taken off the streets.

Our text this morning is something similar. God puts up a poster for us. He replaces one word. Rather than saying, "Wanted: Dead or alive," it reads, "Wanted: dead and alive." God wants to see the Old Adam in us dead and he wants to see the new man very much alive.

One of the most important things for Christians is studying the doctrine of justification by faith. We are all sinners who have fallen short of what God's Law demands from us: nothing less than total perfection. None of us can attain that perfection or righteousness. But we have One who has done it and his perfect life and sacrificial death counts for all people. Our Lord Jesus Christ did everything necessary to bring us life with God. He lived the life that we could not live, and he died the death that we deserve. Our sins have been forgiven and we have peace with God.

We are all born with a sinful nature. It is commonly called our Old Adam. Our Old Adam loves sin. It is his element. He loves lying and cheating, drunkenness and sexual immorality, self-pleasure and showing no love whatsoever for anyone but himself. We are all that way, totally selfish and self-centered. But we are forgiven in Christ!

Now that same Old Adam urged on by Satan and the world comes back with a perverse logic. "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" Why not sin even more? Wouldn't that make God's grace look even better? More sins, more serious sins? Yes, that would make God's grace look awfully good! Somehow that sounds logical to us. Our Old Adam loves that. He looks for any and every excuse to rebel against God and his Word.

St. Paul answers, "By no means! We are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it any longer?" Such a view is absolutely unthinkable. We died to sin. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord." Marriage is a lifelong partnership between one man and one woman. We are not free to stray from that marriage bond as long as that person is still living. If our husband dies, a woman is free to remarry. If you plug this analogy into what Paul is saying here, he is telling us that we once had a husband called sin, but then we died. The marriage is over. We are no longer married to sin. We have a new husband. We remarried and we are married to God. The old spouse doesn't live here anymore.

We cannot be married to both the sinful nature and to God at the same time. That is impossible! If we continue to live for sin as our master, then we do not live for God. Now we are still sinners. We are going to have to fight sin

each and every day of our lives. We will speak about that next week in our sermon. It does mean that sin is not our master. We died to sin.

When did this happen? “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Baptism is a Means of Grace. Baptism is effective in doing something. It accomplishes something. It is not just some empty ceremony that is nice for the church to do now and then. Baptism makes us a partner in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Paul is going to use the phrase “with him” five times in these verses. We are connected with our Lord’s death, burial and resurrection through Holy Baptism.

We know that Jesus did everything that was necessary to procure our salvation. He had to live a life of perfect obedience to the Law and to the will of his heavenly Father. He had to show perfect love toward his fellow man, even his enemies. He had to pay for every sin committed by every sinner. He had to stay on the cross, drinking every last drop of the cup of his Father’s wrath upon sin. It was finished. Nothing more needed to be done as far as our salvation was concerned. By his wounds, we are healed!

We are connected to Christ’s death in baptism. Our baptismal certificate is a receipt, a deed, so to speak, that we are now owners of what Christ accomplished on the cross. What he did for all mankind, he did for me. I have the personal assurance that my sins are forgiven and that I am God’s own dear child. The union between Christ and the believer is so strong that not only can we say that Christ died for us, or in place of us, but also that we died with Christ. In baptism we enter into all of the events of Christ’s life. Our sins became his and his righteousness became ours.

Our old life has to be dead and buried. We cannot be what we once were by nature. Without the presence of Christ our existence was like that of the rich man: “Take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry!” Life was lived only for our own pleasure. Whatever gratified our flesh made us happy. A man brought his boss home for dinner for the very first time. His boss was a very blustery, arrogant, self-centered, and dominating man. The little boy in the family sat very quietly for most of the evening staring at his father’s boss. Finally, the boss asked the little boy, “Why do you keep looking at me like that, sonny?” The little boy answered, “My daddy says that you are a self-made man.” The boss had a smile come across his face. He proudly admitted that he was indeed a self-made man. The little boy then said, “Well, if you are a self-made man, why did you make yourself like that?”

We can’t be self-made. We must be remade. Baptism changes who we are. We are connected with Christ not only in his death and burial, but also in his resurrection. Jesus didn’t stay dead and buried. He rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. We know that Jesus had a perfect, glorified body. It was different.

As our Old Adam is put to death and buried, we too have a different life. We know what the Old Adam desires. “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like.” That sinful nature must be put to death each and every day by repentance.

Martin Luther wrote on baptism: “What does baptizing with water mean? Baptism means that the Old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” That Old Adam has to be drowned. You can’t merely slap a little water on him and hope that he doesn’t return. You have to drown him

daily. You have to put his head under the water and keep it there. Without sin the Old Adam cannot live. Fish cannot live without water. Birds cannot fly without air. So, the Old Adam cannot live without sin.

So what replaces sin? A brand-new life! The things that once dominated our lives have been replaced. Think of the people that Jesus met with. Think of the changes in their lives. Matthew was once a tax collector cheating his own people out of money. He left everything and followed Jesus. Mary Magdalene had once been possessed by demons. She became a devoted follower of our Lord. Zacchaeus would give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back those he cheated fourfold. The Apostle Paul went from a persecutor of the church to its greatest missionary. Their old lives were no more. They were new people.

That is what we are as we are connected to Christ. The new man does two things. First of all, he tries to avoid sin. Now we know that we can never completely avoid it. We are still sinners. But we can avoid certain places, certain people, certain places where the temptation to sin is always going to be much stronger. If alcohol is a temptation, we would not want to hang around bars and liquor stores. If sexual immorality is a temptation, we would want to avoid pornographic sites on the internet as well as other places where a person could "hook up." If certain friends will get us into trouble, we need to find new friends.

Secondly, we need to replace those things that lead us to sin with something else. We are in the world, but we do not want to be of the world. We no longer see ourselves as the center of the universe. We pray that God would open our eyes to see the needs of others. We pray that God would make us generous people so that we respond to those needs. We have been given the gifts of time, talents, and treasures. How can we use those things in the service of others, to show the world that we are different? The new man is alive and open to all opportunities. Baptism unites us with Christ. "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his." We are never alone. Christ is always with us. There is a change in our lives, a change because of Christ.

We love because he first loved us. That is our motivation. He loved and we can love. He shared and we can share. He provided and we can provide. We want to be like Christ in every way. Baptism reminds us of who we are. The God of the universe took time for us, calling us by name and marking us forever with the sign of the holy cross. We have the opportunity to make time for others.

When we were baptized, we were given a new birth, a new beginning. Our sins were forgiven, forgotten, and gone. This new life is given to us, and we are a new creation. We do not say, "I was baptized," but rather, "I am baptized!" We are God's now and forever. We are dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus! AMEN.