

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – June 23, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Galatians 3:26-29 (NIV84)

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27) for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29) If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Dear Sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus;

Baptisms are wonderful celebrations. Parents and grandparents are beaming with joy. The aunts and uncles glow! There are pictures galore and often a meal to celebrate and even gifts. The whole congregation joins in prayer for the child asking God's blessings for the child and his parents. Baptisms are indeed wonderful celebrations – celebrations not just for a day but for a life-time. Our epistle lesson for today gives us a chance to reflect on our baptisms and encourages us to

Theme: Celebrate the Blessings of Baptism

1. You are a child of God
2. You are clothed with Christ
3. You are united in freedom
4. You are an heir of God's promises

The Apostle Paul originally addressed these words to a congregation which consisted of two distinct groups of people. The largest group consisted of gentile Christians. They had heard, received, believed and continued to live in the Gospel Jesus had shared with Paul and which Paul had shared with them. Then there was another smaller but rather vocal group known as the Judaizers – these Christians had a Jewish background and were teaching that even Gentile Believers had to follow certain Jewish customs if they really wanted to be real Christians. As we've mentioned in our "Digging Deeper into God's Word" discussions from the book of Galatians these teachings perverted the gospel of Christ which assures us that we are justified by faith in Christ alone.

Paul points both these groups back to that truth when he proclaims: **You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.** Paul's words reminded his audience that anyone who claims that God is his Father does so, not on the basis of the following customs or laws, but by grace through faith in Christ. You also are sons of God through faith – notice Paul calls us sons – not children of God. Today we often shy away from that kind of language because it doesn't seem to be inclusive. We're inclined to make that statement that we are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. In fact the most recent translation of the NIV says just that. We can speak of ourselves as brothers and sisters in Christ or sons and daughters of God– but Paul deliberately called us all sons of God.

He uses the same word that God uses when he speaks of Jesus as his son. One of the blessings of our baptisms is that God honors us by addressing us in the same way as he addresses Jesus regardless of our gender. As sons of God we can go to our Father in prayer – confident that he will hear and answer our prayers just as he heard and answered the prayers of his Son, Jesus.

The Christians in Galatia were members of God's family. They had been called to faith through the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. They were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy

Spirit. They were baptized into the Christian faith which is centered on Christ Jesus – they, like we, were blessed to be part of God’s family – Sons of God.

Paul assures us that we are God’s Sons through faith in Christ Jesus by pointing out **that all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.** As we celebrate the blessings of our baptisms we are celebrating the fact that we have been clothed with Christ. That’s why the Father can regard us as his sons.

When we are born we are born with no clothes, no perfection and are full of sin and deserving of death – that’s the clothing we received by nature from our parents. Even a tiny baby is sinful from birth – thoroughly corrupt, a slave of the devil, spiritually blind and ignorant, hating God. That’s why Jesus told Nicodemus: (John 3:5-6) **"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6) Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."**

When Adam and Eve sinned God covered their nakedness with garments and he promised a Savior who would cover their sins with his righteousness. In baptism we have received a new set of clothes. Just what does Paul have in mind when he says that in baptism we have been clothed with Christ?

He’s speaking about the fact that through baptism we are being renewed in the image of God which Adam and Eve lost when they fell into sin. This is more than a mere outward change in our behavior. We have been baptized into Christ – we are joined together with him. His righteousness becomes ours. In baptism we experience a new birth which gives us life as God’s sons and citizens of his kingdom.

Paul reminded Titus of this new birth which takes place through baptism when he wrote: (Titus 3:5) **(God, our Savior) saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...**

God’s Word which is used together with the water of baptism makes baptism a gracious water of life which washes away our sins, delivers us from death and the power of the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe.

After baptism God our Father in heaven looks down and no longer sees our sins – he does not see our original sin, he does not see our actual sins, he doesn’t see our poor imitations of Christ or our futile attempts at righteousness. He looks at us and sees Jesus who (Isaiah 53:4-6) **took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6) We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

As Paul explained in (2 Corinthians 5:21) **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** So now when God sees us wearing Jesus he sees his payment for our sins, he sees his perfection which he has given to us.

And this is something that we can celebrate everyday. When we participate in a celebration we often wear fancy clothes. We give the children a bath and dress them up. And then we remind our children to be careful and not to get their new clothes dirty.

Well in baptism we’ve been washed and given new clothes and now our Father in heaven says stay clean, don’t dirty yourselves with sin. In his small Catechism, Martin Luther explains the meaning of our baptisms for our daily lives in this way: 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 as Paul explains in (Romans 6:4) **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.**

There are also passages in the Scriptures which encourage us to cloth ourselves with Christ by imitating his example. (Romans 13:14) **Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.** Those passages are simply encouraging us to continue to live in our baptismal grace – to live as sons of God. Peter writes: (1 Peter 2:21) **To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.**

In this way we show our appreciation for all that the Lord Jesus has done for us. It's our way of respecting our heavenly Father and not bringing dishonor or shame to his name.

Celebrations are more fun when we have someone to share them with. And so Paul reminds us that we are not alone in celebrating our baptisms: **28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

When we see ourselves as God sees us – as his sons – then the natural divisions that are a part of life in this world will disappear. Divisions based on nationality, social status and gender will not become a source of division in Christ's Church. This passage in no way sets aside the various roles and responsibilities which the Lord has given to various individuals according to their stations in life. Christian employees will gladly work for their employers. Christian employers will expect an honest day's labor for the wages they pay. Christian men and women will gladly accept the roles that God has assigned to them. But all will consider each other as brothers of Christ.

And so, we will desire to celebrate our unity with those who have been baptized by gladly gathering together with them for Christian fellowship, serving the Lord along side of them, encouraging them when they are confused or disheartened, confronting them with their sins and calling them to repentance as appropriate.

That is one of the reasons why the Lord has instructed us to gather together in his name and why we organize congregations and groups of congregations that reach out with the Gospel to all people. It's a way of celebrating the unity that we enjoy in Christ. As Paul reminds us in (Ephesians 4:3-6) **Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4) There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- 5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

As we celebrate our baptisms by living together and working together in harmony with our fellow Christians we will also be looking ahead to the wonderful celebration we will enjoy in heaven. Already now, as sons of God, we are heirs of eternal life and his promises. **If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

Perhaps the mention of being Abraham's seed or offspring doesn't mean much to us but when we remember that Paul was writing to a group of Christians which was being torn apart by those who claimed that the only true children of Abraham and the only true heirs of the promises made to Abraham would be those who followed the traditions of the Jews we can understand his pleas for unity in Christ and his assurance to all that it is only a connection to Christ which assures anyone of being able to enjoy the fulfillment of God's promises.

Since we are heirs – we might wonder what our inheritance includes. As true sons of God we will inherit everything that God has ever given or will ever give to Jesus. Paul explains in Romans 8:32 (Romans 8:32) **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**

Indeed he will give us all things in Christ since he's already given us his best! And so we can be sure that just as Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven that we to will live in heaven one day. But even now before we receive that inheritance which cannot spoil or fade we can benefit from our relationship with our heavenly Father. He is the one who provides us with daily bread, he is the one to whom we can go with all of our concerns and troubles, he is the one who offers us the security of his protection and care, the one who knows our needs and well provides, the one who is worthy of our love, respect and honor – the source of our joy and celebrating.

Dear sons of God – Celebrate the blessings of your baptism daily.

1. You are a child of God
2. You are clothed with Christ
3. You are united in freedom
4. You are an heir of God's promises

Amen.