

## MARKED WITH THE CROSS

### Sermon for 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – 23 October 2022

*One of the parts of the Baptismal liturgy is when the minister makes the sign of the cross over the child or adult and says: "Receive the mark of the holy cross (+) as a sign that Christ the crucified has redeemed you."*

*And this morning I would like to take a few verses from Paul's letter to the Galatians which show us just how important the cross is for Paul's life and for ours.*

**TEXT: Galatians 6:14-16:** *As for me, however, I will boast only about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; for by means of his cross the world is dead to me, and I am dead to the world. It does not matter at all whether or not one is circumcised; what does matter is being a new creature. As for those who follow this rule in their lives, may peace and mercy be with them—with them and with all of God's people! (GNB)*

#### **Dear Friends in the Lord Jesus Christ:**

A couple of questions to begin with: Do you know the date of your Baptism? Do you celebrate the anniversary of your Baptism – your spiritual birthday? How often do you think about your Baptism? And how important is your baptism to living your life each day? Something for you to think about.

In my last year of seminary our practical theology lecturer had just come back from a year of sabbatical study leave and was fired up about how foundational baptism was for our congregational ministry.

We had a Sunday School because we baptised infants and their faith needs developing. We have worship services once again to help us grow as God's people. In fact everything done in a congregation was because we were ministering (or serving) people who were baptised into the body of Christ, the church.

But before we look at our text, let's remember why Paul wrote this letter to the people of Galatia. On his first missionary journey he had visited the towns of the Galatia region preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ that we are saved by grace through faith and not by keeping the law.

But it wasn't long before others (Judaizers) came along and said, "Yes, it's good that you now believe in Jesus Christ, but Paul did not give you the whole message. You gentiles still have to obey the laws of Moses, especially getting circumcised, if you want to be a true Christian."

Paul gets quite stirred up as he lays out the gospel again for the Galatians, and us too, saying you are free, free from the law, so do not go back under the law. To do so means that you deny what Jesus has done for you by his death on the cross.

And here, in our text, as he closes his letter to them, Paul emphasises again the importance of the cross, saying he will not glory in, or boast about, anything else but the cross. What Jesus did there on the cross has changed his life. He is now a new creation. He has died to the world and the world is dead to him.

The cross of Jesus now defines his new way of life. Being circumcised or not being circumcised is of no consequence. Rather, Paul says, it is the cross that now shapes and gives direction to his life because it establishes a disconnect between him and the world.

And that is what happens when we are baptised. We are joined to Jesus, the Jesus who died and rose again. We too die to the old life and are raised to the new life.

In Baptism we receive all the blessings that Jesus won for us by his death and resurrection. There is a great picture of this in the Confirmation book, "Growing as God's People." There we see the waters of baptism flowing from the cross.

But there is even more! In Baptism we also receive the Holy Spirit who now wants to guide and control our lives and produce in us the fruit of the Spirit - **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.** (Gal. 5:22-23.)

And there is even more! In Baptism God adopts us into his family and makes a covenant (or agreement) with us saying that we are now his children and that he is our God who will always be there for us even when we mess up and wander off and wallow in the pig troughs of the world. Like the lost son who returns to his father who is there waiting for him with open arms.

So much happens in this simple act of applying ordinary water and God's powerful word to any human being. It is even more miraculous when a child is baptised because we see that it is the grace of the gospel in its purest form. The baby or infant like Maverick simply receives all that Jesus has won for them on the cross.

But the person to be baptised receives the mark of the cross as a sign to show that they have been redeemed (bought back) by Christ the crucified. But it also signifies that the baptised person has died to the old life and has been born again to a whole new life.

The cross is what gives shape to our lives as followers or disciples of Jesus. As Jesus says if we want to be his disciple then we must be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. And that means living a servant life as Jesus did. He came not to be served, but to serve.

Being marked with the cross means that like Paul our relationship with the world is forever changed. We are now out of step and out of tune with the world. We are set

free from the need to obey the law to try and save ourselves.

The law is still there but it can no longer condemn us. Instead, living as a new creation means we are now under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who leads us to do what God wants, to live our lives in tune with his ways.

One other blessing that comes to us who are baptised is that in this world where the individual trumps the community we are now part of the family of God and enjoy the fellowship and communion with our fellow saints. We belong, not only to God, but also to each other. God cares for us, and we care for one another.

Our Calvary congregation helps us to grow in faith and knowledge by providing worship services where we can be assured of God's forgiveness and be nourished with the word of God and the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Such a simple act, but what great and marvellous consequences. So let us thank God each day for our baptism and proudly boast, not of what we have done, but of the cross of Jesus that was made over us and through which we are saved to live for him each day as we wait for his return.

***And the peace of God that passes all understanding keep us safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.***

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