

Living By Faith: Baptism | Colossians 3:1-17
Pastor Nick Shults | St. Mark Lutheran Church | Sunnyvale, CA

In baptism the old self is put to death and we are raised to a new life of the new self. Clinging to the promises of Christ, our new lives in Him are marked by a dying of the “earthly” and a putting on of what is holy.

Introduction

When Jen and I moved into the house that we are currently renting, the property manager, as is typical, ran a credit check on both Jen and myself. He gave us a copy of the report and I was quite surprised at what I found. Nothing to do with the credit score, actually, but with the number of addresses associated with my name and ID.

The report tallied 15 different residences I had lived in and, as I went down the list of addresses...yeah....those were all mine. No, my parents didn't move around a lot....I lived in one house until I was 18. It was after high school that I began to bounce around a bit...living in 14 different addresses across 5 different states.

I went to college in Washington...I moved back to Oregon..I spent a year in Florida...almost 5 years in Sacramento...four years in Missouri...and then back to CA.

And as I reflect on all of this moving and bouncing around and the different places I've lived with different roommates in different parts of the country I've learned a lot of things but I can tell you, without a doubt that one lesson rises to the top of the list. Through all my experiences I've learn this one thing: “Wherever you go...there you are”.

You know what I mean?

Some have attributed this quote to Confucious...others to the sci-fi hero Buckaroo Banzai. But whoever said it first, it's so true right? Wherever you go there you are.

Now, of course at first blush this is stupid and obvious. Wherever you go...there you are. But how many times have we tried to get away from our selves by moving to a new location? How many times have we tried to “start over” in a new city or a new house? I don't know, maybe I'm the only one who thought, yeah moving to Orlando is going to be great. I get to start over. I get to, I don't know, reinvent myself in this new environment, with new people, at a new church I'll be working at. Only to get there and, guess what? Wherever you go...there you are. The same old problems. The same old insecurities. The same old struggles. The same old patterns. Why? Because, “wherever you go, there you are”

We do this over and over in a variety of different ways. We talked about New Years Resolutions a few weeks back. At the beginning of each year, as if January 1st was some magical day, we try to reinvent ourselves, we try to escape our old selves and try to make ourselves new by sheer will and effort. Perhaps you recall that that doesn't actually work out too well for most people. Why?

Because wherever you go...there you are.

You are you on December 31st and January 1st.

So if we know anything, we know that moving to a new city, starting a new job, getting married, having children, going back to school and getting another degree...these are all great and exciting things but when you get to that new city, when you sit down at your new desk, when you get married and have kids and walk across that stage...there *you* are. You are still you with all of your gifts and skills and talents and all that God has given you. But...there you are with your sins. With your insecurities and doubts. Your weaknesses. Your same problems and patterns of behaving and relating to others. Only now you have new surroundings, new co-workers, a new spouse, a new kid, a new title.

I'm not saying that we can't change...that problems, habits, addictions can't be worked on and improved. Of course not. But I'm saying that if we're looking to change something inside of us...by simply moving or quitting or whatever we're going to be very, very surprised when, on the other end of that move or new job, we simply find ourselves on the other end.

Wherever you go there you are.

This is a truism that we can all relate to. I know I can. But there was this one time. This one time when we came into worship, perhaps this very sanctuary, and we came to the font or we were brought to the font by your parents or guardians. You came to the font your old self...the self that was stuck in original sin. This is the sin that we inherit just because we are born. It's the brokenness that we inherit when we were born into a world that has gone amuck. It's super unfair...I get that. But unfortunately it's true. We were born into a world that has been broken because of sin. It's out of whack with how the Creator intended it to be. As so when we're born, we're born into this fallen condition.

But there was this one day when we came to the font with our old selves and, when the pastor dunked us or poured the water over our heads, and said "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" and literally everything changed for us. The old self was washed away and the new self emerged just as Jesus was buried and was raised from the dead. We went to the font as one destined for death...we emerged from our baptism with a brand new self...given to us by grace by our heavenly father.

This is the one time when our truism doesn't hold true. Wherever you go, there you are. But on the day of our baptism God says no. Nope. You came as your old self and now you go as your brand new self...clothed in the resurrection of Jesus. Clothed in a brand new life. So now, wherever you go, Christ is there. Clothing you, covering you with himself and his righteousness.

So now it's no longer a "wherever you go, there you are" type of situation. Now it's a "wherever you go, there is Jesus". And because of this new "Wherever you go there is

Jesus” situation we’re called, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, to live a new kind of life. And that’s what our text from Colossians is all about.

And in this text, Paul gives us a list. Two lists, actually. He gives us a list of what, as people living with this new, redeemed and forgiven, self, ought to give up. What things ought we no longer do because we are now hidden in Christ? Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed. Anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lying. These are the things with the old self that ought to be drowned. Washed away.

And what should emerge, “as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved”? Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Forgiveness. Love. Paul says clothe yourself with these things. I love that image...just as we are hidden in Christ...as we have put on Christ...so too put on his compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, etc...

Sometimes we come at these things and we want to adopt them, to take Paul’s advice and leave these certain things behind and put on these other virtues and we try and do it by sheer will. A couple months ago Jen and I started doing this thing where at night we would journal and jot down the things we were thankful for that day or week. It was an effort to help change our outlooks and to look for the good things in life, to be more thankful, etc. The thinking was that, as we hear a lot, 30 days of working a particular thing will make it into a habit. So journaling for 30 days will rewire your brain to be more positive, etc.

But, honestly...I’m not sure I made it a week. Jen probably did it longer but I do know that neither of us are doing it now. It’s the New Year resolution thing. We got busy, we forgot, we watched Netflix too long one night and just didn’t do it.

We try and make this stuff happen by sheer will.

The baptized life, though, isn’t a life which tries to change or do better by sheer force of will. Although it is a constant struggle. It’s a struggle of the old self trying to rear its ugly head over and against the new, baptized self. But it’s a struggle by which we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. But most of all, it’s a life of confession. The next two weeks we’re going to talk more about confession and absolution but as Luther arranges his catechism he places confession right after baptism. And I think that’s on purpose. Because the baptized life is a life of confession. It’s a life that, though it desires to embody that second list from Colossians, it finds itself returning to the patterns of the old self.

And so, as baptized followers of Jesus we’re called to this life of confession. This life that helps us daily to shed that old self. To confess it. To put it out in the open. To be honest with God and able to say that, you know what, today my old self won. Today the old self, with it’s selfish desires, won.

But the life of confession is also a life of absolution. That's the promise of Christ we cling to today. The baptized is a life of receiving the forgiveness of God won for us by Jesus through his death and resurrection. And the baptized life is a life of continual growth in the Holy Spirit. Putting away that first list from Colossians, and putting on that second list from Colossians. Remembering that the spiritual life isn't a straight line: up and to the right. It's a life filled with challenges and, yes, failure. It's a life filled with difficulties and doubts.

But more than that it's a lifetime of receiving from God his forgiveness and his grace and his mercy as we take this journey together. Knowing that it's no longer, "Wherever you go there you are" but now, because of our baptism, it's "Wherever we go, there is Jesus". Amen.