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Pentecost 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“The Baptismal Life”

Text: Romans 6:12-23 (Jeremiah 20:7-13; Matthew 10:5a, 21-33)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today St. Paul exhorted us: *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies*. Notice he did not say: *don't let sin happen*, for that indeed is impossible. There is not one of us without sin and without need of forgiveness. But he did say: *do not let it reign*. Do not let it rule you – your thoughts, words, or deeds. Do not let it be in charge. And that, I think, is something we would all agree with. No one *wants* to be under the rule of sin.

But the question for us today is not what we *want*, but what **is**. What *is* it like in your life? **Do you control your sin, or does your sin control you?**

So let's take a look, at your life and mine. When we are hurt, what is our first instinct – to forgive, or to hurt back? What are you more likely to do: hold a grudge, or let it go? Do you lose your temper and lash out at others? And what about despair? Do the people, events, and tragedies around us reveal a lack of faith and trust in our good and gracious God by making us fretful or despondent? In all these ways we see the sin that lives in us. But the question remains: *is it controlling us?*

What about how we view sin; or, how we react to it. That might reveal something. For do we consider sin *dangerous*? Certainly if someone were to come up to you and point a gun at you, you would recognize the danger of the situation! Or consider the flooding happening in the Midwest right now – those folks recognize the danger that is headed for their towns, and so they are out sandbagging and trying to prevent it. Or when a car swerves into your lane while you are driving – you see the danger and try to avoid it. *Do we see sin like those things?* As danger bearing down on us? Or have we lost our fear of sin and think it harmless? Or think that when we sin are we just being *a little naughty!* (And we all need to be a little naughty once in a while, right?) . . . So what do we make of this? Is sin *controlling* our minds, our thoughts?

St. Paul seems to see sin quite differently than most of us, calling it not harmless or naughty, but *slavery!* Captivity. Surely that is not a good thing. And yet do we sometimes (or oftentimes) see sin as enjoyable, or pleasurable, or even necessary? Enjoying ourselves as we defame another person's reputation. Finding pleasure in lust or greed or gluttony. Or thinking we *have to* tell little lies, embellish our resumes, cheat on our taxes, or exaggerate our qualifications in order to survive?

So what do you think: **do you control your sin, or does your sin control you?**

Well, the answer I'm going to give you may surprise you. **It is neither.** For while it is true that you do not always control your sin, because you do sin; it is also true that your sin does *not* control you. It does *not* have dominion over you as your king, as your Lord. **And the evidence of that is the fact that you are here today.** You are here today under a different King, a different Lord. You are here to repent of your sin and live under Him. You are here that He have dominion over your life by His Word, Spirit, and forgiveness.

And so you are doing exactly what Paul said to do, when he said: *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies . . . but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.* You are here *presenting* yourselves to God in repentance, that through His forgiveness He raise you to a new life, and use *your members for righteousness.* And when you are here in repentance, sin does *not* have dominion over you. For if sin were your Lord and King you would not be here. But you are here *to live under [Christ] in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.* (Small Catechism, Explanation to the Second Article of the Creed)

For the opposite of sinning (for the Christian) is not to *not* sin. That's usually what we think of first, right? But as I said at the beginning of this sermon, that is impossible for us . . . and it is to live under the Law, relying on what I can do. Relying on *my* strength, like *The Little Engine that Could*, telling ourselves *I think I can, I think I can*, I think I can get over the mountain of sin in my life. The problem is that the mountain of sin in our lives is a mountain that has no end! And while we may think we can, we can't. And all our effort to overcome sin will simply wear us out, and sooner or later, crush us.

And so the opposite of sinning for the Christian is not to *not* sin. It is *not* to look to ourselves for the solution. The solution is to look to Christ. **And so for the Christian, the opposite of sinning is to repent. For that is to live under grace.** That is to come before our King exactly as we *are*, and exactly as He *wants* us – as needy and undeserving – to receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. **And that is the highest worship of God: not to offer Him *our* goodness, but to receive *His*.**  
(Augsburg Conf. XXI.3; Apology IV.154, 310)

And so to come here in repentance and faith is to look to Christ for the answer to your sin and to live as the baptized Christian that you are. For the Christian life **begins** here, and **then** goes out there. What you receive here is lived out there. *And no here, then no there.* And you very likely *will* have a different king, a different lord, ruling over you.

But it is your baptism that sets you apart. That has raised you from a dead life of sin to a new life in Christ. That has made you a child of God, a member of His family. That's what Paul talked about in the first eleven verses of Romans chapter 6 – right before these – and that he indicates is the basis of all these verses, of the Christian life, by using that little, often overlooked word: *therefore*. Or in other words, because of *that* reality (your baptism), therefore *this* reality (a new life, under a new King and Lord). A new life lived under grace. A new life which bears not bad fruit, but good fruit. Because you cannot bear good fruit until you have been grafted as vines onto the good tree. And there's only one of those. The tree that grew from the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11). The tree of life named Jesus Christ.

And so we deal with our sin not by trying to control it, **but by having Christ kill it by having it kill Him.** For His resurrection was the end of our sin and the death of our death. And so to die and rise with Christ is the only way to deal with sin. To die and rise with Christ, living in our baptism each and every day. To die and rise with Christ, living in His resurrecting forgiveness each and every day. To die and rise with Christ, eating and drinking His crucified and risen body and blood, and so not only living in Him, but He in us. Christ living in us, and working in us and through us. Christ reigning over us from the throne of the cross, His death and resurrection the pattern of our lives.

And *then* – from the life of Christ – will flow our life in the world, and the fruit of good works. The fancy word Paul uses for that is *sanctification* – **or in other words, the holy life that we live because the holy One lives in us.**

That confidence is what enabled Jeremiah to live and prophesy in the midst of such a sinful, rebellious, murderous world. For he knew *the Lord was with him*. And that confidence is what enabled the disciples to go out into the midst of such a sinful, rebellious, murderous world. For *the Lord was with them*. And that confidence is what enables us to go out into this sinful, rebellious, murderous world. That *the Lord is with us*. For we have what is most sure in this world: Jesus' Name, His Promise, and His Spirit. Your Father knows every hair on your head. He knows every sparrow that falls to the ground, and you are worth much more than them . . . for you were worth the death of His only-begotten Son! That you might live and not die. That the wages of sin be paid, and so you have the free gift of God, eternal life, in Christ Jesus *your Lord, your King*. To live under *His* rule, no longer a slave to sin, but as a child of God.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.