

United with Christ

A Sermon Preached by Anne Keener
First Presbyterian Church, Franklin, Tennessee

June 21, 2026

4th Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 6:1b-11



Those of you who look ahead may have noticed that I changed the scripture passage for today. I had planned to preach on the gospel text, but when we learned Mike and Katie would be receiving the sacrament of baptism today, I went back to the lectionary options.

I read the Old Testament and Psalm passages, and remember thinking to myself, “well maybe I *will* preach on the Matthew text,” and then I read the Epistle lesson. After reading this Romans text, I offered a simple prayer, “Thank you God.” Do you remember a time when you felt things were happening exactly as they should? That is how I felt at that moment. This scripture calls us to reflect on what baptism means to us and to remember with thanksgiving our own baptism.

In our denomination, we celebrate the sacrament of baptism as a communal act of public worship, so it is accompanied by the proclamation of the Word. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, baptisms often occurred in a private family setting apart from worship, but Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others believed the power of baptism comes from its connection with the promise of God conveyed in scripture. So, the sacrament was brought back into the worship service.

It is important to me and our Presbyterian theology for the sacrament of baptism to be during weekly worship because the congregation participates in the liturgy. During our baptisms today, you (the congregation) promised to guide and nurture the newly baptized by word and deed, with love and prayers, encouraging them to know and follow Christ, and to be faithful members of this church. The congregation can’t make that promise during the baptism if the sacrament isn’t part of communal worship.

Community is important in all parts of life. We all need places to belong, and we need people to be the face of Christ to us in both the joyful mountain-top experiences and the difficult valley journeys. We need people to celebrate with us, to lament with us, and to encourage us into deeper discipleship.

Community is important in life, and community is important in death. As members of the body of Christ, our connection and belonging to God is our foundation. It is why each congregational email following the death of a member begins, “In life and in death we belong to God.” We belong to God. We belong to the body of Christ. We are siblings in Christ, and so we gather as a community of faith to worship God when a member of our church family dies.

We begin each Service of Witness to the Resurrection at the baptismal font because in death our baptism is complete. Most recently we gathered to worship God and celebrate the lives of Mary Lou and Ed Wilson, and I stood at the font to offer the Thanksgiving for Baptism using these words,

*When we were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into his death.
We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death,
so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,
we too might live a new life.
For if we have been united with Christ in a death like his,
we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

Baptism is but the beginning of a lifelong process of faith formation. We are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, so we might “walk in newness of life.” Union with Christ through baptism means we have newness of life in our present life and the hope of eternal life in the future.

Through baptism, sin and death no longer have a hold on us. Even though we continue to sin and continue to experience the pain and evil of our world, it does not have the last word, and neither does death have the last word, since we are also united with Christ in his resurrection

Protestant reformer and theologian, Martin Luther, wrote that “there is no greater comfort on earth than baptism.” Baptism is a sign of God’s covenant of grace. Baptism is a one-time act that has ongoing and continuing effects throughout this life and beyond. Baptism is a sign of what God does for us, not of anything we do.

To use the words from our Book of Common Worship, “Baptism is at once God’s gift of grace, God’s means of grace, and God’s call to respond to that grace. Through baptism, Jesus Christ calls us to repentance, faithfulness, and discipleship... Baptism is the bond of unity in Jesus Christ. When we are baptized, we are made one with Christ, (one) with one another, and (one) with the Church of every time and place.”

Baptism is a sign of God's gift of grace which we cannot earn, but which calls for our grateful response. This is at the heart of our FPC Franklin mission statement, "Responding to God's grace through worship, study, and service." All we do is in response to God's grace, which is freely given to us through baptism.

This is why baptism isn't reserved for people of a certain age in our denomination. When we baptize an infant who isn't even old enough to utter the word "God," it emphasizes that in baptism God claims us in love even before we are able to respond in faith. Through baptism, we walk in newness of life. We begin a new life in Christ. The old life has gone, and a new life has begun.

I am grateful for the art on our bulletin cover today and the description of its inspiration both by Mike Moyers. At first look, there is one figure walking a path which Mike explains widens and descends into darker, more foreboding tones. The art explores our search of God's support and companionship as we journey through life. It balances comfort and anxiety, presence and uncertainty. There are times in our life when we feel like we are walking alone into the foreboding darkness, but if you look closely at the artwork, there is a second figure. This is a wonderful image of our union with Christ through baptism.

Whether we see Christ, whether we feel Christ's presence, Christ is always walking alongside us. Christ is with us in the joys, in the sorrows, and in everything between. Christ is present at the birth of a child, at the font when we baptize, at the kitchen table, the school desk, and the boardroom, at the bedside of those in their last days on this earth, and at the font during our Service of Witness to the Resurrection as we offer our Thanksgiving for Baptism acknowledging that our sibling in Christ's baptism is now complete in death. Friends, we are never alone.

Through baptism, we are united with Christ in a death like his, so we will certainly be united with Christ in a resurrection like his. We are united with Christ now and forever. This union with Christ is indeed a great comfort, but it doesn't exempt us from life's difficulties. We all endure struggles. In those difficult moments, I invite you to remember your baptism, to remember that you belong to God, and to remember that you walk in the newness of life, so you never walk alone. Amen.