

Easter 2009

“Baptism, your own personal Easter!”

“..all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (Romans 6:3-5)

Happy Easter!

I wonder what those words mean to you? I hope you are happy this morning, happy to know Jesus is not dead but alive. Happy to know that because he rose again his death has had the power to forgive and restore your relationship with God, happy that he went through it to save you, happy to know that because he rose from the dead so will you who believe in him, happy that dying and the grave have no power over you any more either.

But maybe you have lost some of your Easter joy after so many Easters. Maybe the natural and economic disasters happening in our world have affected you and made you skeptical about the power of God at work in the world. Maybe what's happening in your own life means you resonate more with the suffering Jesus on Good Friday, than with the risen Jesus on Easter Day. Maybe you hear the story again today but it seems like just that, a story, but you feel distant and disconnected from it. That's where the newspapers usually leave Easter – an inspiring story of life triumphing over death, an example of what's possible if we all rise up together and make the world a better place. But if that's all Easter is, an uplifting inspiring story, then it doesn't really do anything to me and for me and leaves me about as hollow as your average Easter egg.

So how can we connect with what happened at Easter? How can it become part of us and we part of it? The answer is where it usually is for me, right under my nose! – the baptism font in front of me here in this church and the freshly baptised baby Rose Angel remind me and remind all of us of how Easter has and can become ours, and how we can become part of Easter.

That's why I like those words from St Paul in Romans 6 so much. They tell you that you are connected to Easter, part of Easter, share in Easter - with Jesus himself, because of your baptism. Can we read them together:

“..all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. 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”.

Do you get what it is trying to tell you? Your baptism is your own personal experience of Easter! When you were baptised, as God sees it, Jesus picked you up and took you to the cross with him, and when he died on Good Friday, so did you! Your old selfish self, your sinful nature, it is now dead and buried with Jesus in the tomb, and that's where it is meant to stay! And when Jesus walked out of the tomb on Easter morning he had you in his arms, he brought a “new you” with him, a new creation, a new life to live with him and for him already now in this life.

That new life means you can walk through life every day knowing that at every moment you are forgiven by God, at every moment you are safe with God and saved for all eternity, and at

every moment he is with you. Every day has a pattern about it for you as baptised people, the pattern of Easter. It is a pattern of dying and rising. Dying to old negative thoughts, old self centred habits, dying to any trust in our material possessions and greed, dying to anything sinful and anti-god and anything that leads to spiritual death in your life, and rising, rising with Christ and in the power that raised him from the dead to live life with God and for God, in ways that breathe life, not death, to people around you.

When Rose was baptized Jesus took her to the cross with him, the nature she and we all inherit that is self absorbed was crucified dead and buried with Jesus and when he rose, he rose with Rose in his arms, for a new life a different life to live together and share in together. She became part of the story, the story that can go on forever as she lives her life by faith in this Jesus who took her with him through Easter here this morning. St Paul said in Galatians **“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20**

For many centuries people were baptized on Easter Saturday, the day between Jesus' death and his resurrection, smack bang in the middle of Easter. Easter isn't some old story that doesn't affect or engage us. When you are baptized you have become part of the action, a death and a resurrection! And Paul says you walk in that newness of life everyday, forgiven, secure, hopeful, and happy, no matter what life throws at you, just as it did at Jesus, even when the time comes for us to die too, for, as God says:

“If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection”. In the Lutheran church the words of this text are spoken at the beginning of every Christian funeral. The person who died was connected with Christ, part of Easter, beginning at baptism, throughout life, and now experiences the full extent of Easter - their own personal resurrection from the dead. That's what being united with Christ in baptism promises and guarantees. **“we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection”**. I want certainties, not maybies, or possibles, but certainties when it comes to life after death. Paul says it's a certainty, a “dead certainty” because of Christ who died and was raised for us.

Behind me are the cross and the open and empty tomb, between you and Easter lies this baptism font. Every time you enter a church look for it, it is your personal connection with Christ and Easter. If you are baptised, maybe watching Rose being baptised today and hearing these words of God about it, is an opportunity to realise in a new way just how you have become part of Easter, the dying and the rising of Jesus Christ. You too have died and risen with Christ already now, and one day your body will be raised from a grave somewhere too! And if you haven't been baptized but would like to be that close to Easter, a part of the action, it is free and open to everyone.

Easter is about a death and a resurrection, Christ's death and resurrection, Baptism is about yours, your dying and rising to a new life, back then, every day and ultimately on the day you die. To live as a baptized person is to live in the power of Easter, the power that raised Christ from the dead, a power that is there and available for you every day. So once again. Happy Easter! I hope those words sound different to you as you think about your baptism, or the baptism that is open to you too.