

UNITED TO CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION
Romans 6:3-5; Perry Harris Funeral; April 27, 2018

Today's Service began with the "Remembrance of Baptism." Something I did not realize about Perry was that he was baptized as an adult after he married LaVonne. He did not become a member of this church when he got married in this church, but marrying a member of this church clearly led to his instruction in the Christian faith by Pastor Krause and then his baptism. He was united in marriage to LaVonne, and then Perry was united in Baptism to Christ's death and resurrection.

I was just an infant when I was baptized, as many of you probably were also, so we cannot remember anything about our baptisms. I wish I had talked to Perry about his baptism, which he certainly could remember since he was an adult at the time. In fact he was already a husband and father of a baptized daughter, Sandy, and his son, Steve, was on the way. In just over a year, there were three baptisms in the Harris family.

Funerals are times that often bring back memories. As the family was gathered by Perry's deathbed, old and new photos were being looked at. Someone, I don't know who, put together an album full of photos and memories to share. Children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren were sharing memories with each other. Some important memories and milestones of Perry's life were included in his obituary. We were reminded of his family, which was important to him, especially his grandchildren and great grandchildren; the work he did; the service he gave to his country; the service he gave to his church; the things he enjoyed doing.

As a pastor, sometimes I don't get to know a member well until that person becomes weakened by illness or age and can't get to church anymore. Then I begin to visit him or her at home, the hospital, or nursing home. When Perry became sick and was not able to get himself to church anymore, I got to know him better. Toward the end, Perry couldn't do very much, but he knew how to run his Keurig coffee maker so we could drink coffee while visiting together around the kitchen table. I am thankful for the times I had while with Perry, getting to know him better. I understand why he will be missed.

Perry's funeral today will add to your memories. One thing I want you to remember is that today fell during the Easter season. Funerals take place any time of the year, not just during the Easter season, but every Christian funeral is about Easter. Another thing I want you to remember is the Remembrance of Baptism this service began with reminds us that all baptisms, including Perry's and ours, unite us to Christ's death and resurrection.

The "Remembrance of Baptism" we used quotes Romans six where St Paul reminds us that Jesus connected Himself to us by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. And we are connected to Christ when we are baptized into His death and resurrection.

One tradition at the funerals of veterans like Perry is to drape the casket with the American flag. We are reminded that, in serving our country, veterans were willing to give their very lives to protect us and our liberties, which are represented by our flag. But during a Christian funeral, we drape a casket with a white cloth called a "pall", which reminds us that Christians are clothed in baptism with the robe of Christ's righteousness that covers our sin. The white pall does not remind us of our service to God as Christians, but Christ's service to us that liberated us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

The casket pall also reminds us that saints, people like Perry who have died in the Christian faith, are described in the Book of Revelation wearing white robes as they wait for the Last Day and the resurrection of their bodies. They have come out of the great tribulation of this life and world, having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ (9:9-17). In Holy Baptism our bodies and souls are washed clean of sin and clothed with the perfection of Jesus Christ. Perry's casket clothed in white reminds us of the white robe he now wears in heaven.

Funerals, obviously, are about a death and burial. And so are baptisms. At every baptism there is a death and burial. First of all there is the death and burial of Jesus we remember. St. Paul writes: **Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?** Jesus died because of our sin and was buried in the ground.

Being true man, Jesus was able to die physically and be buried, even though He is also true God. Jesus was just as dead in His human body as Perry is now. One difference is that Jesus died with our sins, not His own sins, since He had no sins in Himself. That's the point of Jesus' death. He took our sins into His body to die with them and pay for them.

This is why being baptized into Christ and His death is good news for us concerning Perry. All our sins were laid on Jesus who carried them to the cross and died. Our sins died with Jesus on the cross and were buried with Him in Holy Baptism. This is why St. Paul goes on to say: **We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.**

If Christian funerals and baptisms are about a death and burial, they are also about rising from the dead and living. We are united with Christ in a resurrection like His. What that means is that, just as Jesus rose from the dead in a glorious body, He will return on the Last Day and raise all the dead. But the dead in Christ will be raised with a glorious body like that of Jesus. Perry's Baptism gave him Jesus' victory over death, which we celebrated on Easter.

Going to the cemetery to lay to rest a loved one can be very emotional. When a veteran dies there is something heart-wrenching about the honor guard shooting their volleys and the bugler blowing "Tap." But the name we give to a graveyard, cemetery, and the way we bury caskets are powerful and comforting reminders of Easter and the resurrection of the dead.

"Cemetery" is a Christian word that means "rest" or "sleep" and confesses that, when Jesus comes, He will wake the dead as if they were just sleeping and give them living bodies.

Caskets are buried with the head to the west so the eyes of the deceased are looking east where the sun rises. They are looking for the Sunrise from on high, Jesus Christ, to shine on them and raise them from the dead. It will be as God's Word says:

**Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you** (Eph. 5:14).

When Perry's family gathers later at the cemetery, we will use what is called the Easter Acclamation. I will announce, "Alleluia! Christ is risen!" And the response will be, "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" In Holy Baptism, Perry was united to Christ's death and resurrection. Since Christ has died and risen, Perry, who was united with Christ, will rise with Him. Amen.