

From Sin to community in Christ (June 21st 2026)

We live in a divided world.

Sometimes those divisions seem almost harmless. People argue about which football team is the best. Whether college football is better than the NFL. Whether Ford or Chevrolet makes the better truck. Which generation had it harder. What kind of music is worth listening to.

Sometimes those disagreements remain friendly.

But sometimes they do not.

Families stop speaking to one another. Friendships grow strained. Communities become divided. And even churches can feel the tension when people see the world differently.

We often talk as though division itself is the great problem of our age.

But the Scriptures invite us to look deeper.

Paul does not say that our greatest problem is that we disagree with one another.

Jesus does not say that our greatest problem is that some people are right and others are wrong.

The Bible points to something much deeper.

The Bible calls it sin.

When many people hear the word "sin," they think about individual actions—lying, cheating, hurting someone, making bad choices.

But the Christian faith has always understood sin as something more profound.

More than sixteen hundred years ago, Augustine reflected on the human condition and on the story of Adam and Eve. He came to believe that sin is not simply something we do from time to time. It is a condition into which all humanity is born. We call this Original Sin.

Original Sin does not mean that a newborn baby has committed terrible acts. It means that from the beginning something is broken in our relationship with God.

We do not naturally trust God above all things. We do not naturally love our neighbors as ourselves. We turn inward. We place ourselves at the center. Martin Luther understood this well. He taught that sin is not merely bad behavior. Sin is a heart curved in on itself. Instead of looking first to God and to our neighbor, we become focused on ourselves—our desires, our fears, our opinions, our interests. And when that happens, division follows. Because once I place myself at the center, it becomes easy to divide the world into camps. People who agree with me. People who do not. People who belong. People who do not belong. People who are right. People who are wrong. The problem is not new. It began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve turned away from God. It continued when Cain turned against Abel. It appeared when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Again and again Scripture tells the same story. Human beings separated from God become separated from one another. Perhaps that is why so many of our divisions run deeper than facts or arguments. Sometimes what lies beneath them is fear. Fear of change. Fear of losing something precious. Fear of an uncertain future. And when we are afraid, it becomes easy to judge quickly rather than listen carefully.

It becomes easy to assume the worst about others. It becomes easy to define people by a single opinion, a single vote, a single disagreement. Yet Jesus calls us to something different. With our eyes we often see only differences. We see someone who thinks differently.

Someone who votes differently. Someone who worships differently. Someone whose life experience is different from ours. But God sees deeper. God sees a person created in His image. A person whom He loves. A person for whom Christ died. That does not mean every opinion is equally correct. It does not mean truth no longer matters. But it does mean that no person can be reduced to a political label, a social category, or a disagreement. Every person we meet is someone loved by God. And that includes the people with whom we disagree.

That truth leads us directly to the heart of the Gospel. If sin were merely a collection of bad habits, perhaps we could fix ourselves. If sin were merely ignorance, perhaps education could solve it. If sin were merely disagreement, perhaps better arguments would be enough.

But sin runs deeper than that.

And that is why we need a Savior. That is why Paul speaks today about baptism.

In Romans 6, Paul says that we have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Notice what Paul does not say. He does not say that we save ourselves. He does not say that we earn God's favor. He does not say that God loves us because we have finally gotten everything right. Instead, God acts first. God joins us to Christ. God buries the old self with Christ. God raises us to new life with Christ. This is the heart of Luther's teaching on justification. We are justified by grace through faith. Not because we deserve it. Not because we are wiser than others. Not because we hold all the correct opinions. But because Jesus Christ died and rose again for sinners. For all sinners. For you. For me. For every person sitting in these pews today. That means something important for us as a congregation. Look around this sanctuary. We are not all the same. We come from different families. Different backgrounds. Different generations. Different experiences. We may not always agree about everything. And yet we gather around the same Word. We pray the same Lord's Prayer. We confess the same faith. We come to the same table. Why? Because our unity does not come from agreement. Our unity comes from Christ. The world often asks, "Which side are you on?" The Gospel asks, "To whom do you belong?" The world builds communities around shared opinions. Christ builds His Church around grace. The world says, "Find people who think exactly like you." Jesus says, "Follow me."

That is exactly what we hear in today's Gospel. Jesus does not promise that discipleship will be easy. In fact, He warns that following Him may bring conflict and misunderstanding. But He calls His followers to place Him above every other loyalty. Above every earthly identity. Above every tribe and faction. Above everything that tries to claim our ultimate allegiance. In a few moments we will sing: "Take Up Your Cross, the Savior Said." That hymn captures the heart of today's Gospel. Jesus does not say, "Take up your opinions." He does not say, "Win every argument." He does not say, "Defeat those who disagree with you." He says, "Take up your cross and follow me." Follow me. Trust me. Belong to me. And when we follow Christ, we begin to see one another differently. We stop asking first, "What divides us?" And we begin asking, "What has Christ done for us?" The answer is the same for every one of us. Christ died for us. Christ rose for us. Christ forgives us. Christ claims us in baptism. Christ gathers us into one body.

That is why we are here. Not because we are all alike.

Not because we agree on everything.

But because Jesus Christ has made us His own.

In a world that constantly finds new reasons to divide people, perhaps the Church's greatest witness is simply this:

That people with different stories, different experiences, and different opinions can stand together before the cross and confess:

One Lord.

One faith.

One baptism.

One Savior.

Jesus Christ.

Amen.