

**With Faith, Hope, and Love:
Living Your Baptismal Identity in Age of Anything Goes**

I. Our Disordered world

- a. Through Autumn's eyes: A Case Study in Pastoral Care
- b. The New Sexuality: An Explicit Culture
- c. Sex is your right. (Now separated from marriage and family).
- d. You are entitled to the orgasm of your choice. (Pulled apart from the procreative act).
- e. Marriage has been redefined. (Same sex marriage now a legal right).
- f. Family is redefined.
- g. American marketplace normalizing and mainstreaming these new values.
- h. Human identity is being redefined: Transgender and Homosexual perspectives
 - i. Through Jefferson's eyes: A Case Study in Pastoral Care
 - ii. Transgenderism pushing for new public policies.
 - iii. Being 'woke' & politically correct
 - iv. Demands you respect the pronouns (What do you do?)
 - v. Mainstreaming of delusion vs. compassionate care
- i. History repeating itself: "Acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage is nothing new at all. It is not 'progressive' it is 'regressive.' Contemporary views about sexuality are simply a revival of an older and much less loving view of the world." (Matthew Rueger, *Sexual Morality in a Christless World*, CPH, 2016, p.41)

II. Baptismal Identity: Living with Faith, Hope, and Love in a disordered world.

- a. In the waters of Holy Baptism, God named you and claimed you as His very own child "*in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (*Matt. 28:19*).
 - i. Whose you are determines who you are and what you do.
 - ii. Identity informs behavior/action.
- b. Jesus unites Himself to you. "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (*Gal.3:28*).
- c. Baptism is the beginning of Christ at work in you: "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (*Gal. 2:20*).
- d. Baptism connects you to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: "*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*" (*Rom. 6:4*).

- e. God's grace gives you the strength to live each day by faith, and the ability to see Him at work in your life. Even when your world seems dark, you walk by faith, live with hope, and rest in love.
 - i. The Apostle Paul says it like this: ¹²*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.* ¹³*So now **faith, hope, and love** abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.* (1 Cor. 13:12-13).

III. Understanding Vice and Virtue

- a. Classic Vices: The spiritual maladies of the soul are recognized in the summary categories of the seven "deadly sins" known as:
 - i. gluttony
 - ii. lust
 - iii. greed
 - iv. anger
 - v. envy
 - vi. sloth/acedia
 - vii. vainglory/pride
- b. Vice and Virtue in Scripture: ¹⁹*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.* (Gal.5:19-25).
- c. Teaching vice and virtue in congregation, school, and home.
 - i. Law—10 commandments (help to identify vices and virtues).
 - ii. Gospel—provides the power and ability for virtuous living.

IV. Baptismal Virtue Ethics: "Whose" you are informs "who" you are and "what" you do.

- a. Identity informs *behavior, being, and belonging*.
- b. Baptismal Virtue Ethics: Advocating for moral character and the virtuous life from the point of Christ, His virtues, and His identity all received in baptism.
 - i. *"Every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to do all his life. For he has always enough to do by believing firmly what Baptism promises and brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with His gifts"* (Large Catechism, IV 41).
 - ii. *What does such baptizing with water indicate? "It indicates that the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins*

and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” (Small Catechism, Btsm, Part 4)

- iii. Christian identity and character are rooted in Christ (and His virtues) through baptism.
- iv. A Baptismal virtuous ethical life begins and ends with daily contrition and repentance, prayer, meditation rooted in the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ.
- v. Walking in the virtues of Christ and His Spirit
 - 1. *“It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).*
 - 2. Fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).
- c. Virtues: The wider Christian tradition holds that a “moral virtue is a settled disposition of a person to act in excellent and praiseworthy ways, cultivated over time through habit.”¹
 - i. Similarly, the classical perspective, asserts that virtues are habitual, affective dispositions that govern behavior.
 - ii. The thought is virtues will actualize within a person a new state of being. (*This fails to take the depravity of the soul into full account.)
- d. Cardinal Virtues:
 - 1. prudence (wisdom)
 - 2. justice (rightness)
 - 3. fortitude (courage)
 - 4. temperance (self-control)
 - Theological Virtues established by early Christianity (Apostle Paul):
 - 5. faith
 - 6. hope
 - 7. love
- e. Law and Gospel: God’s law tells you what to do and it shows you your sin, however, it does not have the power to make you do what God desires. That power comes from His Gospel, the Good News of love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Thus, united to Christ in Baptism, He sends His Holy Spirit to work in you (by faith) those thoughts, desires, and actions that are good and pleasing to God, where you act upon them in faith.

V. Walk by Faith, Live in Hope, Rest in Love: The Baptismal Life

- a. Walking in **faith** is the beginning point to combat all the lies, deceit, and false beliefs that the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh throw before us. (2 Cor. 5:4-7)

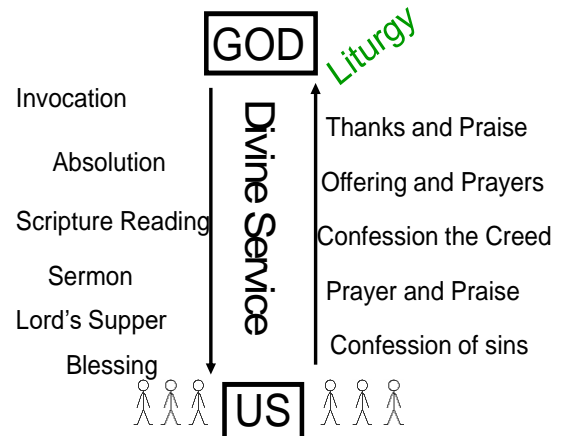
¹ Karl Clifton-Soderstrom, *The Cardinal and the Deadly: Reimagining the Seven Virtues and Seven Vices*. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015) p.4.

- b. Christian **hope** provides a robust optimism because it's rooted in the One who walked through the valley of the shadow of death and came through it as the resurrection and the life. (Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Peter 3:3-4).
- c. Your Baptismal identity that helps sustain you in your search for **love**, helps clarify what true love is, and shapes how you express love acts toward others. God's unconditional love for you is what produces true love for others. When you are secure in His love, you can share that love with others in both word and deed. (1 John 4:7-11; John 13:34; Rom. 8:38-39).

VI. What does this mean?

- a. As pastors, parents and grandparents (Partnership workshops in congregation & school).
 - i. Lifting up what we stand *for*, not just what we are against.
 - ii. What does it mean to be a godly man, husband, father, grandfather?
 - iii. What does it mean to be a godly woman, wife, mother, grandmother?

- b. Forming and Informing our children
 - i. Table of Duties/Vocation (Small Catechism)
 - ii. *Inform* them: teaching how to think, not just what to think (facts, logic, rhetoric).
 - iii. *Form* them: lead by example, wrap them in the love and life of Christ through the life of the liturgy.



- c. Four keys: Be intentional!
 - i. Preach and teach on biblical sexuality, marriage and family, as well as on baptismal identity and character.
 - ii. Caring conversations (read stories about virtue to children/grandchildren)
 - 1. Engage the imagination
 - a. The Chronicles of Narnia (C.S. Lewis)
 - b. The Lord of the Rings/ The Hobbit (J.R.R. Tolkien)
 - c. The Wing Feather Saga (Andrew Peterson)
 - d. Other classics new and old...
 - iii. Rituals and traditions
 - iv. Biblical devotions
 - v. Service
- d. Sample Sermon (*Proper 16, Year B, Ephesians 5:22-33*)

**The Bride of Christ
(Proper 16, Year B, Ephesians 5:22-33)**

³¹“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Paul brings us some timely words today. The Ephesians had some trouble rightly understanding marriage, sex, and the family amid the chaotic and despotic culture of their day. But that’s exactly where his words find us today. In some ways its nice to know that there is nothing new under the sun. But even so, that doesn’t take away the frightening reality of our disordered and dark times. We’re looking for some light. We want some hope. We want some direction. How do we sort it all out? How do we stand firm? And how can we teach the Christian vision of sex, marriage, and the family in the face of a morally absent culture?

I offer a disclaimer here. For almost the last decade I have been teaching and speaking around the country on the Biblical vision for sex, marriage, and the family, so I have grown rather accustomed to graciously talking about issues others may find uncomfortable or sensitive.

But I do so on the basis of Holy Scripture itself. Paul did the same. In the Epistle reading for today he likewise offers some honest talk about sensitive but important matters. He points us to God’s original *creation* of sex and marriage—the one flesh union—along with how that very divine institution also points to the *salvation* and *restoration* won for us by Christ.

Given the sexually explicit nature of our times, it’s imperative that we have intentional, regular, and open caring conversations about sex and marriage with one another, and especially with our children. Whether married or single, widowed, divorced, or never married, it is our privilege as men and women—boys and girls to uphold God’s good gift of sex in word and deed, remaining abstinent and chaste apart from marriage and faithful and chaste within it. We are to use our bodies God made not merely for our own gratification, but for God’s glory and the benefit of our neighbor.

But that’s just it. Our culture sees our bodies as mere playthings meant simply for our own entertainment. Perhaps you’ve seen the T-shirt that says: *Your body may be a temple but mine is an amusement park*. It’s the idea that self-indulgence is what the body was meant for.

When the Supreme Court redefined marriage a few years ago, it was simply the natural result of such think along with the long-standing sexual revolution that has so defiled, disordered, and distorted the God designed one man, one woman, one flesh union. Nearly all society is now of the belief that sex is primarily or only for recreation and gratification.

Forget how it’s a mutual giving of oneself to the other. Forget how it’s not just a union of body, but also of mind, and spirit—a sharing of the complete self amid all the fears and joys of life. And forget the powerful act of creating new life and becoming parents.

The point is, we have arrived at a time that, thanks to abortion on demand, birth control methods, and ideologies like Planned Parenthood, sex is now not only free of any obligations and no longer limited to certain specific relationships, but it is now all about technique, performance, and having the best sex of your life with *whoever* you want, *wherever* you want, and *whenever* you want. Forgive my bluntness. But if the church won’t talk about this, be assured that our culture will and does.

It’s plastered all over magazines, every time you walk into the grocery store. It’s all over the TV. It’s also the world’s largest business on the Internet, with porn sites bringing in over \$100 billion dollars worldwide. There are also sites like *Ashley Madison*, which are designed to help married people cheat on their spouses. Their slogan is “Life is short. Have an affair.”

Recent years has seen the rise of websites like *Only Fans*, users can create their sexual content for a subscription fee. It has sadly only fueled rise of minors in sex trades.

Sexual sins are degrading and demeaning. Even when only “looking” at porn, you steal what is not yours. You steal with your eyes what’s only to be given to you by your spouse, lusting after what isn’t yours to have, while violating and betraying a sacred trust.

To be sure, all sins are equally condemning, but not all are equally defiling. Sexual sins are so severe because they defile and contaminate the body, which is indeed a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). And where there is defilement and darkness, there Satan lurks in the shadows of your sin to destroy your soul.

It’s like a rotting carcass that attracts vultures. The defilement of your body attracts the devil and his demons, who, flock to you to afflict you all the more. It’s no wonder that depression levels are at all-time highs, especially among teenagers and young adults who have come to feel the emptiness and pain of their bodies being used for the pleasure of others.

Without question, there are those among us today suffering from the shame of sexual sins—those that you have committed and those that have been committed against you. Yes, there are those here today who are suffocating under the guilt of unfaithfulness. Yet, you have come to the right place. Jesus Christ has Good News for you! He is the Good News. *In* Him there is cleansing. *With* Him there is healing. *Through* Him there is hope and restoration!

Paul describes this Good News in terms of Christ and His bride—the Church. This is especially helpful because it also gives to us practical wisdom on how a husband and wife can live their Christian life together, while also restoring to us the joy and sacredness of what the one flesh union is all about:

First, listen to the Good News: ²⁵**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.**

This is a picture of what Jesus has done for you. He has sanctified you. He washed you in the water and Word of holy baptism. Whether you are single or married, a husband or wife, young or old, Jesus gave Himself into death for you. He shed His blood on the cross for you. He has paid for your sins, including all your sexual sins.

On the cross He took all your filth upon Himself, all your shame into Himself, and all your guilt onto Himself. He took it all far away from you and buried in His tomb, so it might never harass you or be held against you.

In exchange, He covers you with His splendor and His righteousness. Now there is no spot or wrinkle, or any such thing to defile you. Rather, your defilement has been removed. This includes sins you have committed and those committed against you. All your blemishes are gone. Jesus makes you holy and pure.

Freed from your guilt, *released* from your shame, and *washed* of your sin, you are free to love Jesus and live in obedience to Him. Not because you have to, not because you “get to,” but because you want to. Like a bride loving her husband, so you love the Lord because of His care and love for you.

And once your blemishes are removed, your life of faith is restored. Christ goes to work in you, there His Word guides you and His Holy Spirit leads you. So when Paul calls husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, you have a crystal clear understanding of what that means. It’s unconditional. It’s every day. Like a precious flower that needs protection and care, you love your wife so desperately that you are prepared to give your life up for her.

And if a you as a husband truly love your wife in this way, do you think there’ll be any problem with wives doing what Paul says to them? ²²**Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.**

Here, too, Christ and His bride (the church) show how the marriage union is to be. But just to be clear, Paul puts it quite simply: ³³**However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.** So, I'll ask it again. If the husband loves his wife as Christ does the church, will there be a problem with the wife respecting her husband? No! So what happens? Spots, stains, wrinkles, and the blemishes of sin contaminate the marriage union.

Angry husbands are shouting, "Respect me!" While hurting wives are crying, "Love me!" Neither one are willing to do so until the other goes first. So how do you fix this? You can't on your own. But Christ can and He does.

He calls you to repentance. He takes your pride and He takes your hurt, and He buries them in His tomb. And once again He *lavishes* you with grace, He *frees* you to forgive, He *leads* you to love, and He *restores* your desire to respect.

This is a lesson for all of you young people looking ahead to marriage as well. It is why its so important to find a spouse who loves Jesus, believes the Bible is true, and will make worship of God a priority in your marriage.

When you hear Paul talk about the "one flesh" marriage union, you can see both dimensions to it—the earthly reality of a marriage union—and the heavenly reality of Christ and the church.

³¹**"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."** ³²**This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.**

By faith you see how this stands for the union of Christ and His bride, but how it also directs you in your **vocations as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers.**

Since you have been cleansed and purified, you no longer have to think of this union in an unwholesome or perversely erotic manner, which is different than the healthy God created sexual desire for your spouse that he created in the beginning.

You see, if we want to stand up against the perversity of our culture, teach our children a godly understanding about sex and marriage, and encourage single people and couples toward godly living, then we must be comfortable talking about and regularly teaching about the God created goodness and joy of the one flesh union.

The Apostle taught it regularly to his congregations—Ephesus, Corinth, Galatia, and Romans. And we as the Holy Christian Church will keep teaching it until the day Christ returns to take His bride (the church) down the **aisle** of eternity, and into to the heavenly wedding banquet of the life everlasting.

That was the whole point of Jesus shedding His blood. He laid down His life for His bride, the church, which is you. You are beloved and precious to Him. Amen.