

1-17-21 Baptism of the Lord (put in Reading #740)

Sermon- Are You Well Pleased?

Scripture- Mark 1:4-11, CTW PS 29

Hymns- 205, 302, 739

Theme- As we talk about the Baptism of our Lord Jesus that day in the Jordan, we can think of our own baptism and what it meant for our lives. Maybe it wasn't a momentous occasion when it happened but as the years go by we realize it is the greatest thing that ever happened to us...we actually "grow into" our baptism!

I. Introduction: Happy New year! New year is a time when we take stock, reflect on how we'd like our lives to be and potentially decide to make some changes. It's an opportunity for a new start, a new beginning in a small part of our lives.

A. How about those resolutions? This year I'm going to:

- get fit - get thin - work harder - read my bible more - pray more

The bad news is that most of us will fail.

I'm happy to report that I made a new year's resolution many years ago that I have kept ever since the day I made it. I decided that I would not make any more new years resolutions ever! ... and I never have.

Our passage this morning is about beginnings. Mark is about the beginning of the second phase of the Universe. This morning we are going to look at the Mark reading and see what it has to say about new beginnings.

Sometimes new beginnings are heralded, so that we know that something is coming in advance. John was the man who had the news about Jesus starting his ministry.

B. So before we get on to the new beginning lets take a closer look at the start of it.

John's ministry is prophesied in **Malachi 3:1** "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.'

John in the dessert dressed in camel hair and eating locusts sounds a bit odd to us, but his dress was quite intentional. It was a signal, to those who knew their scriptures, of who he was. Camels hair and a leather belt signified that John was the promised "Return of Elijah". **2 Kings 1:8**

They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."

Elijah's return is also prophesied in Malachi, in chapter 4 verse 5 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes." John, is the man who is Elijah, as Jesus says in **Matthew 11:14** "And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come."

To go to see John was not a simple journey, it was likely that he was based in the wilderness in the valley outside Jerusalem. If he was always based near the Jordan river, as he must have been if he was always baptizing people – it is the only water in the area, - then it is at least a 21 mile walk.

The road out of the city takes a steep descent, and if you have to go off the road through the wilderness the climb is even more difficult. That is to say nothing about the climb back up to Jerusalem. A visit to John is at least a day trip – and quite a long day's trip.

Despite this, John was getting a lot of visitors and what he was doing was similar to the prophets – calling for repentance and a new turning to God and offering forgiveness of sins. But John included baptism in water – something that had previously been a requirement only for Gentile converts to Judaism.

II. John, we are told would not baptize anyone without a clear statement of repentance.

His message is clear "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

A. And one day, Jesus is there waiting to be baptized. If we look at Matthew's account we will see that John had a problem with the idea that Jesus should seek his baptism.

After all, why be baptized for the forgiveness of sins when you are not a sinner. Jesus tells him "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." (**Matthew 3:15**). John consents and Jesus is baptized.

The baptism will have taken place in front of the crowd that was already there listening to John, and others who were there to receive baptism, or who had just been baptized themselves.

It is Jesus' public declaration of His ministry. He has gone from being someone who is preparing to someone who is ready. It is a new beginning, a change of lifestyle, time to get started. He has accepted the plan – that he has come to die for the sins of those who trust in Him.

B. What did the Baptism of Jesus do? It aligned Him with Humanity.

By going through with His unnecessary baptism He has aligned himself with all of us – those who DO need to be baptized and forgiven. He now has that experience that His followers will later share – something in common with our humanity.

As Jesus comes up out of the water he sees heaven being torn open. I doubt that this means something like a strip of wall paper being torn off a wall, it is more like the whole wall being removed so that Jesus can now see things clearly from His fathers point of view.

C. This reminds me of Elisha and his servant in 2 Kings 6.

Elisha is being chased by the King of Aram. From verse 14: Then the king sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see."

Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Truth was that Elisha was not outnumbered at all.

Jesus' vision after His baptism has shown him the truth – the spiritual truth of how things are. He can now see clearly and understand His fathers perspective.

III. What Else did the Baptism do? It aligned Him and us with the Holy Spirit

After the vision, a voice is heard from heaven "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

A. Matthew reports it slightly differently, and leaves us in no doubt that the voice was heard by all those present. Matthew reports the voice saying "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Hearing this must have been very encouraging for Jesus.

The temptation was a new beginning.

B. And encouragement was exactly what he needed. If we read the next verse (12), we see that immediately the Holy Spirit sends him out into the desert to be tempted for forty days. That story is for another day. For today we must remember that Jesus a long time ago made a decision to follow His father, and now he has made a public declaration by His baptism that he is going to follow through.

The next phase of His life has started, it is a new beginning for Him.

In his commentary "Mark for Everyone", Tom Wright says: "Any early Christian reading this passage would also, of course, believe that their own baptism into Jesus the Messiah was the moment

when, for them, the curtain had been drawn back and these words had been spoken to them.”

IV. Why any early Christian? Surely he means any Christian?

Well perhaps not any Christian. For me baptism occurred at a very early age – I was far too young to remember it. I expect that there are a number here who share the same experience, perhaps even most of us.

A. What baptism does provide:

Our baptism provides us with a link into Jesus. It gives us the Holy Spirit, a sign and seal of His love for us. The Holy Spirit also provides us with power, and helps us to see things as they really are – to lift the veil that evil puts over the world, so we can see things with the heavens opened.

Our faith, which we declare in our baptism, or confirmation, means that God looks on us in the same way that He looks on Jesus. So God, the father, can say to us “You are my Son or Daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

We can only adore Jesus, if we first know in our heart that He loves us.

B. That is what these final words of the reading allow us to do – to know that God loves us, so that we can respond with adoration.

There doesn't always have to be a resolution (new year's or otherwise) to have a new beginning. Sometimes a new appreciation of what we already know can change our approach and herald its own new beginning.

So as I finish let's take a minute to repeat these words slowly, but let's put our name at the start, so we can be sure we know who God is talking to.

This is what God says to me: “Peter, you are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

So now lets echo those words of God for each of us, don't just say it in your head, say it under your breath, whisper it, say it out

loud, I don't mind, but as you say it remember whose voice said it first.

...and know you are blessed, Amen? Let us Pray...