

## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 [MW19-02]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 13 January 2019

Does everyone know what a “citizen” is?

- anyone have a quick definition?

Okay then: who is a citizen of this country?

- put up your hands if you are a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand

Great!

- so what do you get as a citizen?  
what are the advantages, the benefits of being a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand?

[some social services, benefits, can own and buy things, not have to keep renewing visa or have a work permit, move around freely, vote in elections, education ...]

What would you say if I told you that

- although you think you belong to this country  
although you think you are a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand
- you are not really ...  
what would you say to that???

And if you are not in fact a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand

- as you imagined you were  
how do you feel when I tell you there is a special “naturalisation ceremony”  
for immigrants that you have to undergo?
- how do you like them apples?!

If you can in fact imagine that

- then you are feeling and thinking and responding  
the way many Jews were feeling and thinking and responding  
when John preached his message of repentance and baptism

*“Turn away from your sins and be baptised and God will forgive your sins”*

- was John’s constant tub-thumping message

Imagine two Jews in the crowd hearing John’s message for the first time

- one digs the other in the ribs and says:

We’re Jews aren’t we? God’s chosen people! We make atonement for sin at the appointed festivals. What’s this guy on about? He can’t really be a Prophet of God if he expects us to be “baptised”. To undergo ‘ceremonial washing’. Ugh! That’s for foreigners – those who are deemed worthy enough - to join our religion. Even then they can’t become one of us!

The other responds:

That's right! Or this 'cleansing', being "baptised", is for those who have done such terrible things they need to be ritually made clean again. But you and me, well, we're Jews through and through. This is our land. Our lives are upright and blameless ...

You get the picture!

- to just such people John preached a message of baptism and repentance which came across like this:

You have become foreigners in your own land! Strangers to your God. Now you need to go through the special ceremony for welcoming foreigners and outsiders to show that you really do want to be God's people. To show that you are prepared to live according to God's ways, and so receive the blessings God alone can give.

It was a powerful message

- and it produced the desired response  
crowds flocked to be baptised by John  
queued in the scorching sun to undergo this ceremony once reserved for "outsiders"
- Jews and Gentiles, God's chosen people and foreigners  
streamed out to the Jordan to be baptised
- to show they had turned away from sin and wanted to live changed lives  
as God's people

Who here is baptised?

- can anyone say what this "baptism" is?  
why be baptised?  
what does it mean for you?

[water, respond to God's love, forgiveness of sins, gift of Holy Spirit, affirmation of faith, welcome into family of God, member of body of Christ, sign of belonging, share in faith, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, beginning of pilgrimage as follower of Jesus]

We've touched on baptism at the time of John the Baptist

- and thought about baptism as it relates to us  
today's gospel tells us about the baptism of Jesus  
so let's remind ourselves, who is Jesus?

Why then was Jesus baptised?

Was there some sin Jesus needed to turn away from?

- was it necessary for Jesus to become a citizen of God's kingdom?  
did Jesus need to be welcomed into God's family?  
did Jesus have to undergo this ceremony to receive a special gift from God?

Why was it that Jesus was baptised?

And you know what, Luke doesn't seem to give us a direct answer

- unlike Mark, Luke doesn't mention the river Jordan, or the water or even that John did the baptising
- Luke does not record, as Matthew does, the argument between John and Jesus about just who should baptise whom
- Luke states matter-of-factly, very simple and straight forward:  
*While everyone else was being baptised, Jesus himself was baptised*

Which sounds an awful lot to me like

- because everyone else was going and doing it, Jesus went and gone and did it too! and to make sure we know that it was not just a good thing to do but absolutely, positively the RIGHT thing to do
- Luke records the voice from heaven saying:  
*You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you*

So does that help?

- does that tell us why Jesus went and gone and did it – got baptised?

Jesus was not merely a citizen of the Kingdom of God

- he was its Prince, the Son of God yet he laid all that aside
- Jesus laid aside his all his privileges, all his benefits as a citizen of God's kingdom and was baptised

There is a North American Indian saying, a proverb, which goes like this:

- before you would judge another person, walk a mile in their moccasins so that you might see how things are from someone else's perspective
- so that you understand why they do what they do and how they think and feel put on that person's shoes, or sandals, and go for a walk in them

Jesus was not just a citizen, he was the Prince

- yet he was baptised, just like all the other people  
Jesus did just the same as all those who desired to enter God's Kingdom
- Jesus was just like those who strove to do their best to live as the people of God

*While everyone else was being baptised, Jesus himself was baptised*

Listen to this story which seems to me to point in the direction Luke wants us to take

A farmer had just relaxed on the front porch when a newsboy delivered the evening paper. The boy noted the sign 'Puppies for Sale'. The boy got off his bike and said to the farmer, "How much do you want for the pups, mister?" "Twenty-five dollars, son." The boy's face dropped. "Well, sir, could I at least see them anyway?" The farmer whistled, and in a moment the mother dog came bounding around the corner of the house tagged by four of the cute puppies, wagging their tails and yipping happily. At last, another pup came straggling around the house, dragging one hind leg. "What's the matter with that puppy, mister?" the boy asked. "Well, Son, that puppy is crippled. We took her to the vet and the doctor took an X ray. The pup doesn't have a hip joint and that leg will never be right."

To the farmer's amazement, the boy dropped the bike, reached for his collection bag and took out a fifty-cent piece. "Please, mister," the boy pleaded, "I want to buy that pup. I'll pay you fifty cents every week until the twenty-five dollars is paid. Honest I will, mister." The farmer replied, "But, Son, you don't seem to understand. That pup will never, never be able to run or jump. That pup is going to be a cripple forever. Why in the world would you want such a useless pup as that?" The boy paused for a moment, then reached down and pulled up his pant leg, exposing that all too familiar iron brace and leather knee-strap holding a poor twisted leg. The boy answered, "Mister, that pup is going to need someone who understands him to help him in life!"

The Good News is Jesus has not come to watch us

- to be a spectator
- nor has Jesus come to give advice from an armchair or even coach from the sideline

The Good News is Jesus identifies with us

- Jesus understands us
- Jesus knows our successes, our temptations, our discouragements
- he also knows our sorrows and failures
- our joys, our hopes, our dreams

Jesus is not just God with us

- Jesus is God totally involved
- one of us, just like us
- Jesus walks the extra mile in our shoes

With Jesus' baptism the Good News begins to unfold more clearly and more powerfully

- Jesus has come to share your life
- to be part of everything you are part of
- to be part of everything you do

Jesus has come to bring God's grace, God's strength, God's encouragement to your whole life

- so that you too may hear your Heavenly Father calling your name and saying:  
*You are my own dear one - I am pleased with you*