

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Mark 1:4-11 [MW21-01]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 10 January 2021

Today we remember the baptism of Jesus

- the baptism of Jesus
if you've ever wondered about why Jesus was baptised
you might be pleased to know you're in good company
- the people of Jesus' own time wondered about it
in fact they were embarrassed by it
and would probably have left it out of the story of Jesus, if they could have
- but they couldn't
it really happened: Jesus, the Son of God, was baptised

This embarrassment had nothing to do with Jesus having no 'original sin' to be rid of

- no, this embarrassment was about Jesus the greater being baptised by John the lesser
when it should have been the other way around
- which is why Matthew has John protest, John omits the actual baptism
and Luke sidesteps the issue
- Mark, of course, simply states it as it was

Beyond this though, baptism did have a deeper meaning

- it meant conversion
not necessarily a "conversion from sin"
but rather a conversion, a "turning toward" a particular way of life
- so baptism was considered a mandate or the undertaking of a mission
a public event for all to see that put a person on the spot
- something like declaring candidacy, not for politics or some civic position
but for the public office of "Christian"

For Jesus himself his baptism was not a cleansing from sin

- but rather a public declaration of his mission
from this point on he would be defined as God's Son
God's envoy, God's prophet, God's lover
- "I come to do the will of him who sent me"
was his declared 'mission statement' at his baptism
- the 'quiet years' were over and Jesus had grown into his name!

Seeing Jesus' baptism from the point of view

- of a turning *toward* and a declaration of mission
throws a lot of light on our own baptism
- our baptism defines us publicly in relationship to God
and consequently to one another
to all who pray openly: *Our* Father
- our baptism defines us as a child of God
as being related to God and God's work
- the baptism we have undergone enrolls us in the public office of 'Christian'

Our baptism means we belong to God

- not privately, as in some clandestine relationship
but publicly, committedly, openly

We have a mission to make this world holy, by our holy lives

- we, each one of us, is God's beloved daughter or God's beloved son in a most profound sense
- that becomes our foundational definition and identity

The problem is, we live in a culture and a media climate

- where who we are and what we are as God's children is easily challenged and often obscured
- we are bombarded with:
 - "why don't you be like this?" or "you should be like that!"
 - "this is the current 'look'", "this is what the cool people are doing"
- the motto of all advertising is: "you have an inadequate image" we will 'make you over', for a price

We are consistently told to be other than what we are

- because what we are is inadequate our mission, we are told, is not to be holy and make the world holy our mission is to be beautiful and feel good about ourselves
- we are nothing if we are *merely* ourselves the *merely* subverting altogether any sense of being made in God's image
- trying to mask that we are touched by the Spirit affirmed in our identity and dignity at baptism and loved madly by God

Cartoonist and satirist Jules Pfeiffer has a panel of cartoons that goes like this:

A boy named Danny is talking:

Ever since I was a little kid I didn't want to be me. I wanted to be like Billy Whittleton, and Billy didn't even like me. I walked like he walked; I talked like he talked. I signed up for the same high school he signed up for, which was when Billy Whittleton changed. He began to hang around with Herbie Vanderman. And then it dawned on me that Herbie Vanderman walked and talked like Joey Hamerlin. And Joey Hamerlin walked and talked like Corky Fabinson. And who do you think Corky Fabinson is always walking and talking like? Of all people Kenny Wellington – that little pest who walks and talks like me!

Mark's Gospel records:

As soon as Jesus came out of the water, he saw the sky open and the Holy Spirit coming down to him like a dove. A voice from heaven said, "You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you."

We too are made in God's image

- loved by God as a precious son or daughter and that gives us our identity and our purpose

Consider this incident from the life of George Washington Carver:

- George Washington Carver was born a slave in Missouri in 1864 he became a great scientist and devoted his life to research projects connected mainly with southern agriculture
- the products he derived from the peanut and the soybean revolutionised the economy of the south by liberating it from an excessive dependence on cotton

Back in the early 1900s when prejudice was rampant he told the black community

- not to let themselves be defined by those prejudiced against them
- he was a religious man and believed strongly that his baptism defined him first as a child of God
- and he demonstrated it ...

George Washington Carver was brought to Washington, D.C., to the Ways and Means Committee in January 1921 to explain his work on the peanut. He expected such a high-level committee to handle the business at hand with dignity and proper decorum. He was shocked when as he walked up the aisle to speak he heard one of the committee members say "I suppose you have plenty of peanuts and watermelon to keep you happy!" He ignored the remark as an ignorant jibe, although it stung him. He was further hurt on seeing another committee member sitting there with his hat on and his feet on the table. When the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee told the member to take off his hat, the man in question said, "Down where I come from we don't accept any nigger's testimony and I don't see what this fellow can say that has any bearing on this committee."

At this point George Washington Carver was ready to turn around and go back home, but he said, as he wrote in his autobiography, "Whatever they said of me, I knew I was a child of God, and so I said to myself inwardly, 'Almighty God, let me carry out your will'." He got to the podium and was told he had twenty minutes to speak. Carver opened up his display case and began to explain his project. Well, so engaging was his discussion that those twenty minutes went all too quickly and the chairman rose and asked for an extension so he could continue his presentation, which he did for an hour and three-quarters. They voted him four more extensions and he spoke for several hours. At the end of his talk they all stood up and gave him a long round of applause. And all because he knew who he was and because he refused to be defined by the labels of his culture.

"Whatever they said of me, I knew I was a child of God"

- that's what baptism is about
- Jesus' baptism and our own baptisms

Positively, baptism is a basic irreversible identity as God's child

- with all the commitment to mission that implies
- while negatively, it resists being defined by the culture otherwise
- no matter how nasty or how seductive that culture

And, no doubt about it, at times – like Jesus

- the baptismal identity and the culture's identity will clash
- and we'll have a crisis
- will we hold fast to what we are under God?
- or cast it aside for the more immediate rewards the world holds out?

Baptism says we are not to be defined by our culture or by other people

- St Paul said it rightly and directly in Galatians 3:26-28

You were all baptized into Christ, and so you were all clothed with Christ. This means that you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free person, male and female. You are all the same in Christ Jesus.

So we end where we began

- why does the church make a fuss over the baptism of Jesus?
- why was Jesus baptised anyway?

Jesus was baptised as a sign of his public commitment and public definition of who he was

- “You are my beloved Son”

Your baptism and my baptism are the same

- we have been defined forever as God’s children
- no one should be allowed to take that identity from us
- or deface it
- or make us ashamed of it

Our baptism, like Jesus’, has given us a mission:

- to do the works of Christ
- to continue his mission
- to make this world holy by our holy lives

No matter what happens we have this, because of Jesus’ baptism and our baptism

- baptism makes us “beloved children” forever!

[space]

Now I invite you to pray with me a prayer for this day

- on the Power Point slide
- in our Prayer Books, page 561, at the bottom of the page

*Almighty God,
you anointed Jesus at his baptism with the Holy Spirit,
and revealed him as your beloved Son;
grant that we who are baptised into his name
may give up our lives to your service,
and be found worthy of our calling;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*