

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

12th January 2025 – Baptism of Jesus

Mark 1:4-11

WATER WORD LIFE

In some ways the prophets of the Old Testament, of which we count John the Baptist as the last of this group, were a bit like the advertising companies of today. They normally had a straightforward message, for them it was, ‘repent and turn back to God’, and it was sometimes presented in a way which would catch attention and be memorable; bringing on a drought, making miracles happen (Elijah and Moses), or like John the Baptist, wearing a coat of camel’s hair and eating locusts and honey. God gave them the means to help their message stick. Without them being miraculous, think about some more modern advertising campaigns which, thirty or forty years on, may still stick in our memories. Can you recognise any of these: ‘You oughta be congratulated’ – Meadow Lea. ‘Ooooh, it does get in’ – Colgate Flourigard. ‘I’ve got a problem with my Gogo mobile. G-O-G-G-O’ – Yellow Pages. ‘The simple things in life are often the best’ – Kellog’s Cornflakes.

‘The simple things in life are often the best’. As a slogan, it’s an oldie but a goodie, and when we think about it it’s probably a saying we could apply to many parts of our life. (fish and chips on the beach over against dinner at a fancy restaurant; a night at home with trashy food in front of a good movie with loved ones versus a flash night out; shorts, singlet and thongs compared to a three-piece suit). It also fits in with our theme for this year of ‘The Awesome in the Awe-dinary’. And during this week as I was thinking about both the baptism of Jesus and our own baptism that saying of ‘The simple things in life are often the best’ came into my mind. What is more simple, more common, than water, that compound of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen upon which all life on this earth relies in some way. Water is also used in washing, and at the time of Jesus some Jews, including His cousin John the Baptist, were using the ritual of washing in the river as a sign of people turning back to God. But then, with the baptism of Jesus, that changed, as God in the person of the Holy Spirit became involved, so that baptism was no longer just a ritual, but with the Spirit working through the water and the Word of God it actively washes

away our sin and guilt and brings us into God's family. Water. Word. Life. It seems really simple, but it's the best.

A big part of this account of Jesus' baptism as we have it here in Mark's Gospel is about His identity, who Jesus really is. This story is told in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but unlike the other two Mark skips all the stuff about Jesus' birth, so he makes sure we know who Jesus is at His baptism. In the simple, ordinary, ritual washing, Jesus hears a voice from heaven saying, "You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you." (v. 11) It's an affirmation, an encouragement, which Jesus would hear again just before He began His journey to His crucifixion in Jerusalem, when this same voice of the Father spoke those words of Jesus' identity when He was transformed on the mountain with three of His disciples watching. This simple act of ritual washing, joined with God's Word, shows us that Jesus is truly the Son of God, the Messiah, our Saviour. Jesus' baptism shows who He is, His relationship with God, and what He means to us. Water, with God's Word, leads to life. When we read or hear it in this account it can seem really simple, but it's the best.

Jesus' baptism also sets up our baptism and what it means also. We regularly get to witness baptisms in our congregation. From the outside, they seem pretty simple; some water being splashed around, some words said. That's it. From the wide variety of baptisms I've been involved in over the years, from mostly in churches with fonts, to swimming pools, to tiny pre-mature babies in humidicribs, to baptising around 20 people in one service in an Indigenous celebration worship service in the bush far out of Alice Springs, in all of those things I've never seen a light, heard a voice, seen a dove, or had any outwardly miraculous thing happen. Some water, some words given to us by Jesus Himself, prayers for the Holy Spirit's work in and through these things. It all seems so simple.

And yet, just like Jesus' baptism is all about His identity, so too is ours. In Romans six Paul gives us words which we use at the end of our funeral service, 'Don't you know that all who share in Christ Jesus by being baptized also share in his death? When we were baptized, we died and were buried with Christ. We were baptized, so we would live a new life, as Christ was raised to life by the glory of God the Father. If we shared in Jesus' death by being baptized, we will be raised to life with him.' (*Rom. 6:3-5*)

CEV) Water. Word. Life. It seems so simple, but in baptism, despite the fact that we don't see or hear those miraculous signs, we really do see the awesome happening in the ordinary. Our baptism, combined with that ordinary water, and then with the Holy Spirit working through the words of Jesus' command to baptise "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit", this brings us the new life Paul talks about here. This simple act joins us to Jesus' death, and then also to His resurrection, so that we have new life in and through Him. In our baptism we are made God's children, in a bond He will never break even if we sometimes wander away from Him. In the simplicity of the Holy Spirit working through the water and Jesus' words, we are given a gift which is the best we can ever receive; new life with God, now and forever.

To go back to those advertising campaigns which can stick with us for many decades later, their purpose is of course to change us in some way; to change how we spend our money, what we do, even how we think. Again, in a way, that's similar to what is happening in our baptism. As the Holy Spirit working through water and God's Word brings us into God's family, we are also called to change. In the baptism service either the person themselves, or if they are too young their parents and godparents on their behalf, are asked questions like, 'do you reject the devil, and all His works and all His ways, so that you will no longer be led by Him?' It is a call to repentance, turning back to God, in the same way that our Bible reading today begins with John the Baptist calling people to turn back to God. A great example we have of repentance is in the parable of the Lost Son; the young man who goes away from his father to spend all his money on wine, women, and song, but then when he hits rock bottom and is sorry for what he has done, he turns around and heads back home to the father who has been lovingly waiting for him this whole time. That is such a simple and ordinary, but great and awesome, picture of how a life of repenting, turning back to God, works as His children.

How does it look for us, then? Repenting means two things; both being sorry for what we have done, but also turning around to try and not do that again. We all have parts of our lives where that is needed, so it's not for any of us to be judging others in this, but to be looking at ourselves. Is it about where we put God in our lives: first and foremost, as the foundation of everything else, or do we make

Him just fit in with where we are comfortable with Him being? Is it how we treat others; are we accepting, forgiving, supportive, with people on all levels of our relationships, or do we find it harder to do that with some people, for whatever reason? How do we view the things we have in life, and the personal gifts and abilities we are given; do we see them as blessings from God to both fulfill our needs and to enjoy, but also to be used in service to Him and others as He calls us to do? Or does our love for these things get between us and our relationship with God, and also between us and our relationship with others? During this week, I encourage you to think about the call we have to turn back to God, and the vows you made or which were made for you in your baptism (perhaps then repeated by you in your confirmation). You are loved by God. By the water and the Word in your baptism He gives you new life in Him when you continue to believe. As His child, what areas of your life are you being called to examine and turn around so that your life shows who you are as His child?

The Awesome in the Awe-dinary. The Simple things in life are often the best. Water. Word. Life. Baptism. Such a simple act which by the power of God brings such great blessings to us. Whatever you go through each day, remember those words of comfort Martin Luther held on to, 'But, I am baptised'. God's love for you will never change, and in the water and words of your baptism He gives you the guarantee of that. By His forgiveness and grace, each day turn back to Him so that He can give you the new life He has for you, both now and forever. Know your identity as His child, be sure of it, and ask for His guidance and strength to live that out every day. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- 'The simple things in life are often the best'. Are there any situations, activities, etc, to which you would apply that statement?
- What do you know about your baptism? Were you old enough to remember it? If not, what have you been told about it? If you don't know much about it, if possible ask those who were there to tell you.
- What does your baptism mean for you each day? Reflect on the guarantee of God's love and acceptance which we have through our baptism. Are there any times or situations when you especially hold on to these baptismal promises God gave to you?
- As God's people, each day we are called to turn back to Him. Think about your life, your attitudes, your actions, your words. In what ways are you not living as one of God's children? Give these over to God and ask for both His forgiveness and His help to walk His way each day.

Pray: thank God that in the simple act of baptism the Spirit works in the water and the Word to wash us clean and make us one of God's children. Ask for God's help to live our lives as those who have been adopted into His family.

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