

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera, Qld.

10th January 2021 – The Baptism of Jesus

MARK 1:4-11

WHO YOU SAY I AM

When you put letters together they become words, and when you put words together they can become quotes. A bit of a test to get us going today, who said these quotes; ‘I came, I saw, I conquered’? Julius Caesar. ‘Such is life’? Ned Kelly. ‘Life wasn’t meant to be easy’? Malcom Fraser. ‘I have a dream’? Martin Luther King Junior. ‘I will never concede’? Donald Trump. ‘You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you’? God.

Words put together like these, and so many others, do many different things. Some words describe, some make us think. Some inspire, some incite. Some proclaim. The effects of some of these words and quotes only last for a short while, some last for a long time, and some go down in history. And, for some, the effects can last for eternity.

When Jesus was about 30 years old, at the beginning of His ministry and this adult part of His life which around three years later will lead to His death on the cross, He goes to His cousin, John the Baptist, who is baptising people in the Jordan River. Ritual religious washing had long been a part of Jewish life and was enshrined in Old Testament Laws. John has now developed this a bit further to have one baptism, instead of many, as a sign of people turning back to God. Jesus would go on to develop this practice of Baptism even further, but more of that later.

John first of all proclaims to those listening to him; ‘Turn back to God and be baptized! Then your sins will be forgiven.’ (v. 4) That’s another well-known quote, and one which we hold on to as describing the basis of our faith and trust in God’s grace; the promise of forgiveness. But when, no doubt, many of those who were there and receiving this washing were admiring, perhaps even worshipping, John because of the news of forgiveness he is proclaiming to them, he goes on to put himself in his place; “Someone more powerful is going to come. And I am not good enough even to stoop down and untie his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy

Spirit!” (v. 7,8). John is the warm up act, the last of the prophets preparing for the One who is to come.

Water is here used for washing; only ritual washing because the muddy waters of the Jordan River would not be thought of as being able to make one truly clean. But this isn't how water was always used in the times before Jesus. In the Bible we have several accounts of water being used as part of God's judgement: the flood, the Egyptians being drowned in the Red Sea while pursuing the Israelites, Jonah. But the waters used here in Baptism do not bring judgement and death, but instead they bring the declaration of innocence before God and new life.

And it's this proclamation and this new life which we see when Jesus comes to get baptised. Mark's account here is shorter than that in some of the other Gospels, but he still has that quote which tells us what this event is about and what it means; “You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you.” (v. 11)

Right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry God comes into our world, His creation, the 'sky opens' we are told, and He proclaims that Jesus is His Son, and that He is pleased with Him. We see here a great act of the Triune God, with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all being present and playing roles in this event. But then also, imagine what this event meant for Jesus. He is about to embark on a journey of three tough years, which He knew would end in His death. His family would doubt Him. His closest friends would betray Him. Those He came to save would reject Him and want Him dead. As He hung dying on the cross His own Father, the One who sent Him, would abandon Him. The Father would again proclaim Jesus as His Son about three years later on the mountain before Jesus went on His final journey to Jerusalem, and that Jesus is the Son of God would be the words also spoken by a Roman centurion when Jesus died on the cross.

We can think about how many times these words of His Father gave Jesus strength, courage, and direction during these years; ‘You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you’. How many times as He was rejected, ridiculed, betrayed, cast out, did Jesus think back to that day of His baptism and find strength in thinking of His Father and remembering, ‘I am who you say I am’. His identity,

proclaimed and guaranteed by His Father in His Baptism, enabled Him to carry out the role for which He had been sent; to earn our forgiveness and open the way for us all to come back to God.

Another well-known quote, by many Lutherans at least, comes from someone who was born a bit over 1400 years after Jesus lived on earth; Martin Luther. As someone who took on the all-powerful church of his time because he disagreed with what it was teaching about God's love and grace, Luther also suffered a lot of persecution, hardship and rejection. But we are told that when the pressure of it all really got Luther down, as we can well imagine it would have, he would say, 'But, I am baptised!' Again, in the unshakeable guarantee of who God had made Luther to be in his baptism, Luther was able to find comfort and strength in being able to say, 'I am who you say I am; your loved and forgiven child, and nothing can change that!' Like Jesus, Luther's baptism gave him the guarantee of God's forgiveness, and the assurance of a love of the Father which would never end.

Remember back again to the baptism of Jesus. At that time John the Baptist told people that he was just the forerunner of the One who was to come, and; "I baptise you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!" (v. 8) John had progressed from the regular Jewish ritual washing to a one-off baptism of repentance. And then, he says, Jesus will make Baptism so much more. About three years later, after Jesus' death and resurrection as He was getting ready to leave His disciples, He said to them (another well-known quote for us); "Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teach them to do everything I have told you." (Mathew 28:19-20 CEV). Other New Testament writers then, like Paul, make a lot about how are joined to Jesus through our Baptism; His death to sin becomes our death to sin, and His cleansing before God becomes our cleansing, and His new life becomes our new life now lived in God's forgiveness.

Our Baptism, the baptism commanded by Jesus, the baptism through which the Holy Spirit now works to join us to Jesus' death and life, our Baptism gives us the absolute assurance of God's love and forgiveness, and our Baptism now also enables us to face all we go through and look to God and say, 'I am who you say I am'. When we are overwhelmed by guilt by either things we are doing

now or have done the past. When we find it hard to stop something we are doing even though we know it is wrong. When our worries bring us down. When we feel overburdened. When we find it hard to forgive or accept people. When we struggle to address the needs of others. Like the baptisms of Jesus and Luther, our baptisms don't make the hard times and the bad feelings go away, but they do give us strength and assurance to face them. And, when we are still overwhelmed, the identity the Holy Spirit now gives us in Baptism, as a special child of God, helps us to know that God will never abandon us.

Some words remain forever, some words quickly pass away. The words God spoke to each of us in our Baptism, 'you are my loved and forgiven child, I will never leave you', remain with us in this life and for eternity. With this assurance we can always thankfully and confidently look to all God has done for us in Jesus, to which we are joined by our Baptism, and say; I am who you say I am! Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION:

But I Am Baptised!

Our Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not just a one-off washing, but a cleansing, an assurance, and a joining with the forgiveness and new life we have in Jesus which lasts forever.

- Think about your baptism: you may be able to remember it, but if you can't what do you know about it. If possible, ask someone who was there, like a parent, what they remember about it.
- How often do you think about your Baptism? Do you have any reminders of it, eg, a candle, book, or other gifts, photos, a certificate?
- Is there anything you can do remember your baptism and what it means in your life more often?

I Am You Say I Am

In our Baptism God says to each of us; you are my child, and I will never do anything to change that.

- Is it always easy to live as a child of God? Is there anything in particular you struggle with?
- Are there any times or situations when you especially need this assurance that God gives to you in your Baptism?
- Thank God for the gift of your Baptism, and for the identity that gives you as His child. Pray for His help and strength to live as who you are, and for His help when you find this difficult to do.

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