

St. Mary's Sermons

Sermon Date: Sunday 22/1/12

John 1:29-34 the baptism of Jesus

Unlike the other gospel writers in his gospel John does not give us an actual description of the baptism of Jesus, although it is abundantly clear that he does see it as a very significant event. Instead John, in his typical manner, concentrates on the spiritual ramifications of Jesus Baptism. This morning I want to draw out two important points from short passage. 1. That Jesus is the one who forgives sins & secondly that Jesus is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.

From the onset of his ministry John has been waiting for a very special day. Now finally at long last the time for the promise to be fulfilled has arrived. Initially it started like any other day, John preaching to the crowds. But then all of a sudden Jesus emerges and stands in front of him and John instantly knows that this is the moment he has been waiting for. As John looks at Jesus the Holy Spirit stirs within him and he points straight to him and announces to everyone within earshot. "Look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Today John's words strike us as being very unusual. What does it mean to call someone the Lamb of God? To the Jews who heard John speak these prophetic words, the implications would have been perfectly clear because they were familiar with the story of the exodus from ancient Egypt and the resulting practice of slaughtering lambs in the temple every Passover. This act was carried out in order to remember how the blood of lambs had been daubed on the doorpost and lintels of every Israelite home so that when the angel of death came he passed over the houses marked with the blood of the lamb but visited death upon the homes of those that were not.

In his commentary on this passage my friend Mark Stibbe writes. "John says that Jesus is the true Passover lamb. His blood shed on the cross will be our covering, our protection, our salvation. Thanks to the blood of Jesus shed at Calvary, my sin which separates me from the father's love will be removed. At the cross, the father's righteous anger with sin will be satisfied. Anyone who puts their trust in the blood of Jesus can boldly say, 'dad's not mad with me anymore!'" God wants us to know that deep assurance that absolutely nothing can shake that we are truly loved and accepted by our heavenly father.

You will remember how having left Egypt the people arrived at the edge of the Promised Land and how they sent 12 spies into the land. When the spies returned they discouraged the people by saying that the people who occupy the land are strong and the cities are well fortified, we can't possibly take the land, we have even seen Anakites there and we all know that they were 8ft giants. There is a lovely verse in Deuteronomy 1:31 where Moses tries encourages the people he says, "Do not be terrified or afraid, the Lord your God is going before you, he will fight for you as he did for you in Egypt and in the desert. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you as a

father carries his son.” Where does a farther carry his son? There is only one place, on his shoulders, of course.

When we lived in Worthing we often used to go to the beach for a walk. On numerous occasion one or other of the children would come running up to me, “Dad please can we have a ride on your shoulders?” I’m afraid they are all too big now for shoulder rides. I used to love it but it used to freak Di out. Sitting on Dad’s shoulders gives a completely different perspective on everything. Not only do you feel completely and utterly safe but instead of looking up at everything you are able to look down on everything instead. Suddenly you can see over the wall which seemed so tall.

John then goes on to highlight a second implication of the baptism of Jesus. John was called John the Baptist because he baptised people in the river Jordan. Those who he baptised were responding to his call to turn away from sin and he baptised them as a symbolic way of demonstrating this repentance. For a Jew this was very radical. Normally baptism was reserved for non Jews wishing to adopt the Jewish faith.

The word baptise in the original Greek language of John’s gospel literally means to plunge, dunk, drench, saturate, soak or totally immerse. When John immersed Jesus in the River Jordan, something extra ordinary happened, something that did not happen in the case of any one else. John says that the spirit came down from heaven like a dove and settled on Jesus. It was this fact which marked Jesus out as being unique and special. John had been prepared by God the father in advance to look out for the one on whom the spirit rested. This was the sign that confirmed that Jesus truly was the messiah.

The coming of the spirit in this way on Jesus was significant for two reasons.

Firstly because since the end of the Old Testament era some 400 years before the events John is describing there had been an eerie silence from heaven.

Secondly, throughout the whole of the Old Testament the spirit came upon a person and gave them a specific ability to do a specific task but then was withdrawn again. He visited people but was never a permanent resident.

Here John says that that the spirit of God came upon Jesus and remained. This is truly a history making moment. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus marked a significant new era. John goes on to tell us that God the father had told him that the person on whom he saw the spirit rest would be the one who would baptise people in the Holy Spirit. Just as John had totally immersed people in water so Jesus would totally immerse people in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We now know that this part of John’s prophecy concerning the mission of the Messiah was finally fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The disciples who following the shock death of there leaders were disconsolate, dejected and fearful are suddenly transformed when they were completely drenched by the personal empowering presence of God.

That same presence should be characteristic of every single Christian. We should be completely dripping with the power of God. We should be like a sponge when it has dunked been in a bucket of water and lifted out again. The sponge cannot contain the water but it spills out everywhere. Continuing that particular analogy is helpful because it reminds us that the sponge soon become dry and needs to be dipped back into the water if it to go on being useful. So we need to keep coming back to God and asking him to refill us with his spirit. When was the last time you were so filled with the holy spirit like that?

This week I read an article in the New Wine magazine by Mike Pilavichi in which he reminded us that the gifts of the spirit are not an optional extra for the super keen but an essential part of the tool kit of being a Christian. He went on to talk of the importance of continuing to eagerly desire the spiritual gifts. He wrote, "I have met a number of people who once used the gifts of the spirit but have stopped because they have felt burned by some of the excesses and exaggerated claims they have witnessed." He also reminded me of what John Wimber taught us way back in the 1980's of the need to learn to see what God is doing and join in and bless it.

As I read this article I sensed that this applies both to me personally and to us as a fellowship. There are those here who used to pray in tongues, but who have given up. Those who use to pray for healing but have become discouraged, those who use to operate in the gift of prophecy and words of knowledge but currently have neglected the gift. I spent hours at college learning New Testament geek but since leaving college have not used it at all.

I would go as far as to say that I now would not have much of a clue. I can't remember. If you do not use the gifts that you have been given, you will lose them.

In his article Mike Pilivitchi tell the story of a man having a pint in his local. He senses that God wants to heal one of a group on a nearby table. So he asked what he should pray for and gets "toes". So he goes over to the group tells them that he is a Christian and asks if there is anyone with an injury to there toes that he could pray for. A woman responds and is healed another member of the group asks for prayer for there arm and is also healed. They tell the man that when they arrived in the pub there were atheists but that they are no longer atheists! God can use anyone of us in this sort of way just have to be open to how he wants to use us.

I believe that God wants to stir up the gifts within us again. If we are serious about being involved in the mission of God, it is time to repent and to ask God to release those gifts afresh among us.