

## **‘Make a life change.’**

**January 8<sup>th</sup> Vicar Joyce**

*Genesis 1: 1-5, Acts 19:1-7, Mark 1: 4-11.*

Henri Nouwen – a deeply sensitive poet, theologian and philosopher wrote this as he reflected on the baptism of Jesus.

‘All I want to say to you is “You are the beloved”, and all I hope is that you can hear these words as spoken to you with all the tenderness and force that love can hold. My only desire is to make these words reverberate in every corner of your being.’

The gospel of Mark is the oldest, the shortest and the most direct of the gospels. Mark does not include a birth story, but rather moves directly to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He identifies the baptism of Jesus as an acknowledgement of Jesus’ divine sonship. The symbolism of the heavens opening, the divine voice, and the descent of the dove, dramatically show Jesus starting his adult ministry with God’s acceptance and encouragement – surely the most positive affirmation Jesus could receive.

Similarly for us: to be recognised, appreciated and encouraged for what we do in life is a great gift to receive.

I would invite us to gather at the font. ( After people have done so, Joyce continues)

Inside the bowl is water which I have blessed. Clearly there are differences from our baptisms held here and the baptisms of the crowd gathered around John at the river Jordan. Water is common to both. With John it was very public, people from Judea and Jerusalem jumping into the water and immersing themselves. Jesus came from the other direction, from Nazareth in Galilee. Remember the sounds of water you have experienced. There may be a roar as water cascades down a hillside or the gentle lapping of the slow flowing water as it caresses the bank of a meandering river. A river may have both. The sea has its own infinite range of sounds. There’s no sound so pleasant as a glass of cool water filling up to quench our thirst.

We know the value of water, for sustaining life, for cleansing, refreshment, growth of plants. In summer we drink water for refreshment, to moisten our throats, to be kept cool. At this time of year we play in, on and under water to our joyous delight.

The river Jordan itself marked for the people of God a crossing from a life of slavery to a life of freedom. It is very symbolic. When I saw the river, the portion was shallow enough to paddle in. Small fish played around my feet.

Already I hope you are thinking of the many meanings baptism can have. John emphasised the need for repentance with a willingness to change the direction of one’s life.

He saw his role as being to make people ready for the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus did not need to repent. By coming for baptism he was supporting John, curious perhaps. He would have known of all the excitement and expectations surrounding John the baptist. Jesus stood with those who had sinned. His mission was to save the lost. He identified with humanity, those seeking forgiveness, the wiping clean of slates.

*I’m going to offer you now some questions to discuss among yourselves.*

What can you remember and/or what do you know about your baptism? What does it mean to you now? Who were your Godparents or sponsors? Have they helped your Christian formation? Do you feel a link with where it took place? Does it signify you knowing that you are precious? Do you feel that you belong to the church?

Are you a godparent? Have you helped your godchildren? What difference have you made to their lives? How have we welcomed those who are baptised into the church?

I have given you a sheet of paper with those questions on it. Reflect on them at home, talk to others.

In Mark's telling us of Jesus' experience he describes an immediate tearing apart of the heavens. Remember in *Isaiah 64 verse 1* the prophet asks that God would tear open the heavens and come down. That day there certainly was a supernatural happening, experienced by Jesus and noted by others there. The words tearing apart are the same words used as the temple curtain ripped as Jesus died. Some people use the phrase about a place being thin, where God is felt.

Mark understood Jesus as being anointed by the Holy Spirit for his vocation. Our baptisms also speak to us of the vocation each of us have, as servants, to make this world the best it can be. Don't diminish your call by feeling unimportant. Each of us is a child of God. Each of us is highly valued by God.

You are the beloved. God's Holy Spirit dwells in you.