

Sermon 11th January 2015 'Into Right Relationships'
Acts 19:1-7 Mark 1:4-11

Prayer: God-who is with-us and calls us into right relationships, open us to understand when the relationships in which we participate every day are *not right*. Inspire our concern and guide our actions with your Spirit, as we question and seek to change them to reflect your justice and love. Help us claim our baptisms in Christ as a blessing and source of power. Amen.

'Love the Lord your God and **love** your neighbour as yourself' one of the few God- Jesus non-negotiable rules for those who follow the faith. We are called to love by love. Oh we in our humanity have put lots of rules in place, but Jesus showed his radical nature when it came to rules and regulations. He went to the root of the matter and said the most **important thing** we can do is to love God, neighbour as self. It is this triangle that sets the shape for right relationships for all humanity- I believe, and love is its centre.

There is a love echo which resounds all through Jesus life and ministry – but it is especially loud at particular points for him. Today at his baptism, in *Marks Gospel* Jesus (and Mark and us) hears God declare 'I love you' – and for us the spirit of God descends into Jesus as he rises from the waters – another Holy triangle is forged. Father, Son and Spirit – **Holy** is our One-in-three God.

But even more is that this is a triangle of relationship – a right relationship of harmony, sharing, mutuality and complete individuation within the whole. Scholars would assure us Jesus didn't need to be baptised from 'sin' – but we need to see Jesus baptised and God gave us such a picture – the voice, the dove, the son... words to describe the picture of God-with-us in our humanity, including our sin 'places'.

"Baptism" is what our scriptures teach for us today; Jesus by John into the river Jordan and then much later in the early church story the baptism in the Holy Spirit of some who had received baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins from John in the Jordan.

John who was given the name 'John the Baptiser'; John the Baptist, *from who the Baptist Churches trace their name*, was waiting for Jesus, was preparing the way in faith for one who **would come** – who would more powerful *because* the text seems to imply – because he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.

So our form of baptism comes from John's baptism of repentance and for the forgiveness of sins **and** Jesus's in the Holy Spirit. That's what Luke is telling us through the Acts reading today. John's baptism was completed in Jesus's. We have another faith triangle – our 'Baptism' is held in place by repentance, forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. For the 12 disciples in Act's that we heard about today they had the gift of being given tongues and prophecy – and as we know these are only a few of the gifts given in the power of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are a sign of baptism; a way of making our baptism real in our lives, in our mouths and through our hands. Gifts to share with/ for our *community and world*.

Baptism simply isn't a 'nice' thing to do, a popular trend, a current fashion to follow – **in the Christian** faith it is a dangerous thing to do because, **because** of the relationships that happen when we are baptised; **because** of the consequences of the Holy Spirit in our lives; **because** of the commitment we make in accepting our being baptised into God through Jesus and the power of the Spirit.

The danger element in one way begins because we baptise in water – water is both life and death to humanity. We are haunted by **water claims** ^{*1}one theologian! We are at least 50% water ourselves! The actual % varies according to age and gender, adult's average 57-60% while infants are 75-78% which obviously drops with age! In our humanity our thirst is a more urgent need than hunger: we can last longer without food than water. Water is essential for life, so when we baptise in water, we are affirming **the power** of water for both life and death. So we use the power of water's death to bring new life; in turning **from** all other ways; in turning **to** Jesus ways we are making real for people to see, and hear our

*1 Frank Yamada *2 Katherine Matthews quote *3 J deLaar

choice in life. The old word, the Bible's word for this action is repentance. In baptism the old ways of our lives are left – dead to us and the **new life** in Jesus is life to us **because** in our turning to Jesus and in his forgiving of our sin – the Holy Spirit can be poured into us.

When we come in baptism we are telling everyone that we have turned **our life towards** Jesus ways, teachings, following – turned away from everything else and are committing ourselves to doing our best to live as Jesus would want. We are accepting the relationship rules he commands – to love, God, neighbour and self in the right way! We are accepting life and our life's ministry, as Jesus's did.

This is another of baptism's dangers – I did warn you baptism is dangerous! I think it is so sad that far too many people can't live with the dangers of baptism and turn away from it. **In following Jesus** and his baptism we in our turn are claimed / adopted by Jesus father 'God' as beloved children. We are claimed into the right relationship of father, Son and Spirit and called just as Jesus was into a life of ministry and service – the right way, and in right relationships.

And how good are we??? Well, most of us have still lots of learning to do. Most of us have had close enough experiences to Jesus wilderness experience – or sensed an absence of God or spent hours worrying why our prayers weren't answered the way we thought we needed or why,... or... or.. or. And as I was writing this I was reminded of a discussion' about 'Summer School' and how that is an intensive learning experience. I wondered if our faith has its own versions of 'summer school' and some of us survive, *others don't*, as we have faith 'wilderness' experiences. Cv

So what is it that helps us survive? I believe baptism – remembering and **claiming the power** of our baptism is one of the faith tools to help us survive. I have shared this story before but I like it and think it is helpful for us. If one of the 'great' fathers of the Churches reformation can struggle – then we ought to be reassured we are not alone; find comfort and learn how to survive. It is the scholar ^{2*} 'F. Dean Lueking who tells the story of an anxious Martin Luther, the Reformation leader, "as he struggled through the lonely months of his safekeeping in the Wartburg Castle.' I am baptized,' he would scribble on his desktop, and **remember his baptism** as he battled back despair" (*The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels*).

We're exhorted, too, to "Remember our baptism," **not** as a sentimental journey **or** an effort to recapture lost enthusiasm, but **to seek** equilibrium on a storm-tossed sea, to get our bearings, to remember who (and whose) we are.' We belong in love to a powerful – the most powerful **Holy One** who is with us – even in baptism and all the dangers that brings and it is so right to belong! It is our home in faith – but it is not hide-away, it is not a safe retreat from life nor is it a passport to a 'nice' life.

It is a passport to a good and right life. It is a passport to ministry in Jesus name, **in his power** through the Holy Spirit and a life of learning! In his baptism Jesus showed us how much he is willing to do to be with us – in relationship with us and as one with us. He calls us into belonging together – a community of faith with one another. ^{3*} The empowerment of God's Spirit, then, is not just for the individual, but for the community, and for us to be creative in serving one another, and serving our neighbours.

Baptism is always a mark of our belonging in God through Jesus and an empowerment for bringing God's saving, restorative work into the lives of others. God, self and others – the great commandment is a natural consequence of our baptism. The challenge is for us to accept our practical and philosophical involvement in Jesus ministry that was launched on the day of his baptism.

That our baptism means active participation in Jesus activity in the world which was as he declared: Isaiah 61:1 "to deliver good news to humble people. He has sent me to heal those who are broken-hearted, to announce that captives will be set free and prisoners will be released."

Are we in the right in our relationship to do this? *Maybe* start of the New Year is a good place to **turn** again to him and **claim** the power of our baptism as a **blessing and source of power**. Amen.

1 Frank Yamada 2 Katherine Matthews quote 3* J deLaar