

First Sunday after Epiphany: Baptism of the Lord 12.January.2020

Year A readings

Isaiah 42:1-9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Servant, a Light to the Nations

42 Here is my servant, whom I uphold,

my chosen, in whom my soul delights;

I have put my spirit upon him;

he will bring forth justice to the nations.

² He will not cry or lift up his voice,

or make it heard in the street;

³ a bruised reed he will not break,

and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;

he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴ He will not grow faint or be crushed

until he has established justice in the earth;

and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

⁵ Thus says God, the LORD,

who created the heavens and stretched them out,

who spread out the earth and what comes from it,

who gives breath to the people upon it

and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶ I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,

I have taken you by the hand and kept you;

I have given you as a covenant to the people,^[a]

a light to the nations,

⁷ to open the eyes that are blind,

to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,

from the prison those who sit in darkness.

⁸ I am the LORD, that is my name;

my glory I give to no other,

nor my praise to idols.

⁹ See, the former things have come to pass,

and new things I now declare;

before they spring forth,

I tell you of them.

Acts 10:34-43 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Matthew 3:13-17 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Baptism of Jesus

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Sermon 12 January 2020

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord.
Amen*

So, on this the first Sunday of Epiphany (the season when we celebrate the revealing of Christ to the world) we have come to the week when we celebrate the baptism of Christ.

How does this fit into our Discipleship theme?

Christ was revealed at his baptism by the voice of his Father in heaven declaring his **love** for Jesus, and how pleased he is with him. This love for Jesus is declared before he has even begun his ministry. It is not dependent on his work or his fulfilling his role to his Father's satisfaction. He has not shared with anyone, cured anyone, fed or watered anyone He has not yet given sight to the blind or cured the lame or freed the oppressed as the prophet Isaiah had described of the Messiah. These are the things that Jesus did later on and which further confirmed to John the Baptist that he was indeed God's chosen one.

God the Father **loves** Jesus **just for being**, and God **loves us too - just because we are here**, not because we have earned his love. Eddie often says when he baptises infants that their baptism is a symbol of God's love for them before they have even done anything. A child that is brought to baptism has not earned that love. God's love is limitless and unconditional. There is no test that we have to take to earn it. There is no pass or fail mark to earn God's love. It is by grace that he loves us, because **God wants to love us**. St John said:

*'There is no **fear** in **love**. But **perfect love drives out fear**, because **fear** has to do with punishment'¹
and **God's love is perfect**. Isaiah said of that love that we are not excluded for our imperfections: '*a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench*'²*

That message that the Disciples and John the Baptist heard about Jesus: that God loved and was pleased with his beloved son- is a message too for all of us. We as baptised believers are beloved by God. That love is infinite and unending. We need to grasp the infinite nature of God's love for us so that we can share it better with others. For as John also said

'We love because he first loved us'. ³

Our response to God's love is to love him back and to love those he loves- all of them (however unlovely they may seem). That love causes us to love in return and to share that love with those around us. For it is so infinite and great that we cannot keep it to ourselves. Even if we were not to love automatically as a response to God's love, as disciples we should love because we are commanded to: Jesus said: 'The greatest *commandment is this: Love the Lord your God with all your*

¹ 1 John 4 v18

² Isaiah 42 v3

³ 1 John 4 v19

heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”⁴

In the second reading which we heard from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter is sharing about Jesus with Cornelius and all his household -all that Jesus did in his ministry and that he had died in our place because God loved us so much to restore our relationship with him. He explained that his sacrifice was accepted- as was shown by his return after the resurrection when he commanded the disciples to go out and testify to this good news, not just for the Jews, but for everyone. Just like Peter and the early disciples, if we really catch on to the enormity of God’s love for us, it will evoke a response. God’s Love is something that is by its very nature limitless and unconditional. We will be learning how to follow Jesus in loving without limit. Peter had to learn that the message was not exclusive to the Jews. Just like Peter we have the promise of God’s Holy Spirit to guide us on a daily basis- if we will let him.

In our series of sermons on discipleship we will later on be talking about the principles of giving a proportion of our time, our efforts and our money as a tithe to God, but our love for him should be growing in a limitless way, as we learn more about him and relate back to him in love. **Love is by very nature limitless.**

Our love may be small at first, as we are only human and imperfect, but as we walk with Him and relate with Him and grow with Him, we will recognise His love for us more and more. Our love for Him should grow naturally as a consequence- without limits, reflecting His love back to the world around us, our families, friends and those we meet and work with day by day.

Father God, May we become more and more aware of your limitless love for us day by day, and may we indeed reflect that love back into our lives, just as Jesus did, so that it is recognised by those we meet , by the power and guidance of your Holy Spirit. Amen

⁴Matthew 22 v36-40, Mark 12 v30-31 and Luke 10 v27