

VPBC Sermon 29th January 2017 The Jesus we never knew. X05 Inauguration

The Baptism of Jesus Matt 3:13-17

Last week we were thinking about John's baptism and this week we move a few verses on to include the baptism of Jesus. This is part of the theme for this year "the Jesus we never knew."

We thought about taking seriously the way God speaks and acts in a particular culture – that of the Jews- that it helps us understand how the Good News can challenge and change our own cultures. So, to understand Jesus it is of value to consider his Jewishness. We considered too how from Pentecost to the Council of Jerusalem the early church understood that God was not just God of the Jews but God of all. Peter says in Acts 15:8 *"God who knows the thoughts of everyone sows his approval of the gentiles by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he had to us. He made no difference between us and them, he forgave their sins because they first believed."*

There is always the task of translation because the Good News is for all cultures and God loves all ethnicities and cultures equally and in each culture Jesus is to be made known and the call and challenge to follow him made real. This becomes the basis for Jesus transforming culture (as culture never stands still). We are to find new and faithful ways to translate the good news both in our own culture and between cultures the story of Jesus.

John the Baptist breaks into the social and political ferment of first century Palestine with an already intense religious excitement and heightens expectations further by adding fuel to the fire by saying Messiah is around the corner. This is in a situation where Herod stole, spent and undertook massive building developments through taxation and terror. The Roman occupation was tough. It was a time of troubles, division and fear. But also of hope. Would Messiah now come? To deliver, to liberate and restore the house of Israel?

Yes, he is coming says John but as Messiah is coming you need to prepare. From out of the desert, John is the new Elijah, acting as a herald for the coming Messiah. Challenging and calling people back to God. *"Get the road ready for the Lord: make a straight path for him to travel."*

To be the people of God, heritage was not enough, rule keeping was not enough, but to wash away the old ways of thinking and behaving ready and prepared in preparation for the real baptism that Messiah was bringing. The preparation for the Spirit of God, fulfilled on Pentecost where there was wind, fire and the coming of the Spirit. Received not in the desert but in a city- Jerusalem- where Jewish people from every country in the world, including converts to Judaism, heard the great things God had done in their own languages. Where what God had promised became true before their eyes.

"I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message, your young men will see visions and your old men will have dreams. Yes, even on my servants both men and women." Acts 2:17

God's indwelling presence in people's lives swept in - bringing revelation, hope, true cleansing and new power to live differently as God changes our heart in the inside. This is about to happen. The wind of the Spirit is also a wind that sorts, sifts, assesses. It is also a fire that purifies so that there is both judgment and salvation at the dawning day of the Messiah.

Now as inaugurations go, Jesus example was pretty low key. From John and Matthew, we have a sense that it was **a public event but still low key**. Compared to recent inaugurations, there were no comparisons as to just how big it was compared to other inaugurations. Nor was it high profile activity from day one. The BBC reflected that in the one full week of Donald Trump's presidency from January 20th 2017 it had run over 200 stories as the use of presidential decree is seemingly being used as an expanded character account for a twitter feed. For the coronation of the Queen you could watch it on TV for the first time and it was carefully crafted for the Great and the Good, the pillars of the Establishment and the State. To mark the start of a new reign of the "new Elizabethan's" heralding a new day on the 22nd of June 1953.

We don't have any date for the baptism of Jesus but that does not mean it wasn't significant. Indeed, it was highly significant and recorded in all four Gospels. In Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:31 to 34. Jesus appears out of obscurity from Nazareth. On days when many hundreds are following John into the waters confessing both national and personal wrong doing, to cleanse and make them fit for God's coming rule, **Jesus too turns up**.

Matthew alone records John's initial hesitation "I ought to be baptised by you, and yet you have come to me." (Matt 3:14). Yet it is only after Jesus has been baptized that John really understands who it is on the guest list. As the gospel of John (John 1:13-33) records "*I (John the Baptist) saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him...I still did not know that he was the one...I have seen it and I tell you he is the Son of God.*" He affirmed this to two of his (John the Baptist) disciples the next day that this Jesus is the "*Lamb of God.*" **It is Luke that gives us the backstory to John and Jesus and how their mothers Elizabeth and Mary were related** and given the incidents recorded around the birth these would have been recounted. Matthew records too several cumulative incidents such as the dream of Joseph and the angel's instruction (Matt1:21) "*She (Mary) will have a son and you will call him Jesus- because he will save his people from their sins.*" "*Nonetheless, even if John knew Jesus, and the stories circulating about him why did Jesus get baptised? It links to when we get to look at the time of the temptations in the wilderness as to just what sort of Messiah Jesus would turn out to be.*" Commentators say we will have to (probably) wait for the first 100 days to get a true measure of the Trump presidency but before Jesus begins his public ministry the character and nature of just what that will look like and be based on is **forged first in the wilderness**.

Meanwhile, all the gospels put this event as the **starting gun for Jesus public commissioning**. This is followed by the year of inauguration running from being baptised in the Jordan to the attempt on his life in Jesus hometown of Nazareth to kill

him. A year of popularity from the four fishermen initially becoming followers of Jesus at the Sea of Galilee to the Sermon on the Mount. Next to John the Baptist killed by Herod in the dungeons of the fortress at Macchaeruss in beginning the final year of opposition and culminating in his death by crucifixion and the resurrection in the garden tomb. That's one scholars timing of events but it is difficult to be sure.

So, while Jesus accepts John's point it is right that he Jesus accepts the lower place to do all that God requires. **The call and the commission stands within the tradition of the Jewish story to date.** Jesus says of these predictions and patterns that they are important. In Matthew 5:17 he says to the assembled crowd *"Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to away with them, but to make their teachings come true."* It is in a relationship with God that is focussed on obedience and therefore identifying with those who were sorry for their wrong doing in order to fulfil his mission among repentant Israel. As all Israel was challenged by John to return to faith Jesus could not remain aloof from this. Jesus reply shows his acceptance of his destiny as one with his people and one with humanity in solidarity and call to be appointed to the work he alone could perform.

The basis of that uniqueness begins to unfold. The focus of this account is on Jesus commissioning not on a public revelation of his mission. Indeed, this was not publicly stated throughout his ministry and only grasped by his closest disciples much later- as Matthew records in Matt 16 :13-20 at Caesarea Philippi when he asks them the question *"Who do you say I am "*.

Then heaven was opened to him is reminiscent and similar experience to Ezekiel's vision in chapter 1 at the Kebar river rather than the Jordan. The Spirit of God coming down. This was not a new spiritual status. Jesus was, is and remains the Son of God but commissioning for his work as Messiah. Yet in the midst of prophecies and expectations of wind, fire the Holy Spirit according to Luke 3;22 *"came down upon him in bodily form like a dove"*. This is curious. Why the meekness and humbleness of a dove? The cheapest of all the temple sacrifices. Some feel it relates to Jonah (whose name in Hebrew means "dove ") and that it as this bird that was a signal that salvation had come as the waters receded. Others feel it speaks to the Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis chapter 1 verse two *"the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness and the power of God was moving over the water."* A bigger picture of the breaking in of God's new creation in the work of the Trinity also revealed here. We do not have the time to reflect on what we see of the Trinity here, which is a pity because it tells us profound things of what God is doing through the extension to all peoples into becoming the people of God through what Jesus has done. Though he needed no repentance or cleansing **he became our substitute** as Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5:21 *"Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God."*

Why the voice from heaven? A sign that the long silence had ended. A period of 400 years lasted from the last recorded prophecy from the Old Testament till now.

This was not an echo but the direct speech of God as fulfilment is dawning and with it some astounding content. A fusion of Psalm 2 and the suffering servant of Isaiah. Even David had been a disappointment but the ultimate king's son, the Messiah, will be the true inheritor and ruler of David's throne in kingly authority. But this "*This is my own dear son*" is linked with "*with whom I am pleased.*" The chosen servant, whose destiny is to suffer abuse, opposition and to die for the sins of the people and of whom we read in Isaiah 42:1 "*the one who I have chosen, with whom I am pleased. I have filled him with my Spirit and he will bring justice to every nation.*"

Jesus is both Messiah and suffering servant equipped for the task.

Yet his disciples are largely dense and dull. Even Jesus got fed up with them. "*how long shall I put up with you?*" he asked. (Matt 17:17). They fret and worry. Their lack of faith exasperates Jesus. Why does Jesus invest so much in apparent losers? Jesus never tried to hide his loneliness and dependence on other people. **He chose his disciples, as he chooses us, not as servants but as friends.** They gave up everything for him as he had given up everything for them. Very ordinary people. Low key, but significant. Significant because they might be with him and that he might send them out. Jesus works with unpromising recruits who failed to exercise much spiritual power, sometimes acted badly and childishly but nonetheless we are inheritors of this new community that was being established then. We are a part of this community now and the extent we are contributing to the future at this time in this part of London. So, Jesus says to them, as he says to us – "*as the Father sends me – so I send you.*" (John 20:21). **The humility and meekness of Jesus is bundled up with his authority, presence and power.** We too have now the Holy Spirit so what challenges does this present now for us making the story of Jesus known?