

2021-02-21 – Rev Esma Collins-Marks

## Mark 1: 9-15

This morning's Gospel reading is all about the Baptism of Jesus. This is one of the events that all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) describe and so was obviously an event that the Early Church saw as of great importance. St. Mark's Gospel gives us the briefest details.

John the Baptist has been summoning people everywhere to repent and Jesus, amongst others, responds by being baptised. But have you ever wondered why Jesus needed to be baptised?"

Does Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God need to repent? Well before I am accused of heresy let me say that I don't think Jesus needed to repent.

I think St. Matthew's account gives us a clue why Jesus was baptised. In that account we read that John the Baptist at first refused to baptise him, because John felt unworthy. However, Jesus said: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." So what did Jesus mean? By submitting to baptism, Jesus acknowledged God's claim on him, as on others, for total consecration of life and holiness of character.

I believe there are three reasons that Jesus was baptised.

The first is that for Jesus baptism was a sign of his complete dedication to following the will of God. For everyone else who came to John for baptism, this required a change in direction – hence the call for them to repent of their old ways and turn to God's way of life. But for Jesus, baptism was simply a public declaration of his love of God the Father and that He was following the will of God in His life. And you will recall Jesus words in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he knew that he was going to die on the Cross, he prayed: "Father if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). It was the ultimate submission to the Father's will – to go to the Cross for our sakes – to reconcile us to the Father. But following the Father's will was painful. Jesus' baptism was a public declaration of his commitment to the Father.

The second reason is it announced the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. Both John the Baptist and God the Father both confirmed Jesus unique calling publicly. Jesus baptism was a consecration for ministry.

The third as an example to us. Jesus taught his followers to be baptised – and here he is giving a firm lead. His baptism was an example that we would do well to follow.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28 reads as follows - Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Mt. 28:19-20). And we see God the Father's response: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

I think this is the nugget that we would do well to apply to our own lives – that we should live so that the Father is pleased with us. For when God is pleased, nothing else matters.

It reminds me of a story that Jonathan Goforth (1859-1936) the great Canadian missionary in China, used to tell. Jonathan's father put him in charge of one of the family farms at the age of 15. He drew special attention to one very large field, which had become choked with weeds. His father told Jonathan "Get that field clear and ready for planting. At harvest time, I'll return and inspect it."

Jonathan put a lot of time in ploughing and re-ploughing, sunning the deadly roots and ploughing again until the whole field was ready for seeding. He then went and procured the best seed for sowing. When all was finished, Jonathan invited his father over to inspect the field. When his father arrived, Jonathan led him to a high spot from which the whole field of beautiful waving corn could be seen. Jonathan didn't say a word – he only waited for the converted "Well Done".

His father stood for several minutes silently examining the field for any sign of weeds, but there were none. Turning to his son, he just smiled. "That smile was all the reward I wanted" Goforth used to say "I knew my father was pleased. So it will be if we are faithful to the trust our heavenly father gives us." Amen.