



Date : 7 January 2018
Series : The Baptism of Christ
Preacher : Bernice Stott
Readings : Mark 1:4-11

INTRODUCTION

Jesus baptism is the theme of this the first Sunday of the year. A minister who was baptising a child, rolled up his sleeves dipped his hands in the font and smiled reassuringly at the baptismal party saying: "He should be here somewhere." Thinking about our relationship with Jesus and our year ahead of us, are we vaguely saying "He (Jesus) should be in here somewhere?" Unlike us, God is very specific about Jesus Christ and says in Mark chapter 1. "You are my son whom I love." The beloved one should not be here somewhere but rather centrally placed as our Lord Saviour and friend in 2018. I want to concentrate on 3 words that surface in the Mark 1 reading, they are: 1.) Beloved, Baptism and Spirit- all 3 indicate that we need to cultivate New life in 2018.

THE HISTORY OF NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

The tradition of setting New Year's resolutions originated 4000 years ago in Babylon, but it was the Rome of 153 BC that popularised the idea of New Year resolutions. The early church declared New Year and its celebrations to be of pagan origin. It was only after the middle Ages that the practice of celebrating New Year became entrenched. Since then the customary set of New Year's resolutions has accompanied New Year celebrations. The scripture is deeply concerned with new life not new resolutions and if we were asked to define the inward, invisible meaning of baptism it would be: New life in Christ. Let us take a look at the Mark passage.

JESUS' BAPTISM

By being baptised by John, Jesus identifies with us in our humanity: full of beauty and yet sinful, though he himself was sinless. His baptism marks the beginning of his mission. The opening of heaven and the audible voice saying 'you are my son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased' is God's acknowledgement of Jesus' son-ship. Thinking we might be God's beloved in highly appealing to us human beings. It is also highly appealing to us that baptism is a rite that marks a crossing over from death to life. We are given and experience the refreshment of new life. It's something God does on God's side. Who doesn't want their lives to be refreshed and renewed? Jesus is said to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Fire burns away the dross, the chaff or things we need to leave behind, in other words our deadness has to go, for the new to arrive. It is a purification process. If baptism is the sacrament or ritual, who then is the conveyer or mediator of new life? This giver of new life is the Holy Spirit and what is the point of giving us new life? So that we can grow into the likeness of Christ. It is so that Christ can be known globally and locally throughout history as the one that all people and all creation here been waiting for- the Christ-the Messiah. There it is in Mark 1) Jesus is God's beloved and so are we 2) In the rite or ritual of baptism we are given new life 3) The Holy Spirit conveys new life to us.

WE ARE BELOVED

Let me come back to the word beloved. We are fully loved by God. People are inherently good because we are made and loved by God. What a difference it makes to teach our children that they are blessings first and sinners only second. So much low self-esteem, internalized oppression and violence to self and others rules our society. Low self-esteem is self-hate. Self-hate works itself out in the form of rape to house breaking, from hijacking to drug trafficking. Low self-esteem, not knowing we are truly God's beloved leads to our binges; over eating, over drinking, and over spending.

ERICH FROMM

The famous psychologist Erich Fromm discovered for himself this original goodness, that we are all God's beloved and wrote the book the Art of Loving. He says that love is the only satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence. Loving is an art and we must master not only the theory of love but also the practice of love. He learnt that our deepest need is to overcome our aloneness and our separateness. Jesus at his baptism is given assurance and overcomes his aloneness by God's audible voice "You are my beloved: with you I am well pleased. "Pleased with what? Jesus had not begun his mission, it was certainly not his work that God was pleased with. To God we are his beloved simply because we are beautifully made by him. Our culture promotes the notion that being loved is all important. While being loved is therapeutic for us, this is not nearly effective as loving. Loving is the active process of loving self, others, causes, activities and it mobilises people in a constructive direction. Jesus knew in the very ground of his being that he was the beloved and then went on to be loving to others and expanding their growth. It is crucial that we know we are the beloved but it is more important to be a loving person than to be loved.

BAPTISM= NEW LIFE

The second word- baptism is the mark, the badge of new life. New life is given to us for a purpose, to have a sense of mission to change the world around us. A study has been done of the ten core empowering beliefs of champion South Africans. The first core value that they have in common is this: They have a sense of mission, a calling that gives their lives purpose and the power to change the world around them. Companies and corporates are now ensuring that they develop mission statements with their employees because they have seen that a value guided life brings change and results. Why not sit down and write yourself your own mission statement based on your own core values, knowing that you have new life within, because of baptism.

MY MISSION STATEMENT/ JOHN STOTT

I am going to begin adult education courses again at home this year. They are mostly about unleashing creativity and they are not likely to be attended by committed Christians or church going people. I have just set out a small mission statement about the courses, knowing that I will have the power of the Holy Spirit to change a small part of the world around me. How can you change the world around you? Size and quantity is not the issue. The issue is what are you passionate about? Is it: litter on the beaches, crimes prevention in your neighbourhood, teaching children, skills upgrading in your place of employment? The options are plentiful and it will also depend on your gifting. New life is given to us for a purpose and a sense of mission.

John Stott is known internationally as a church leader and bible expositor. A friend once told me a story about how John Stott influenced one person in his immediate sphere of influence. My friend was on the staff of All Souls Church in London when he was rector. Each week all the staff came together for a bible study, from the humblest to the highest. No matter who you were, your contribution was considered valuable by this great theologian. A woman who was the “tea lady” went on to become a lawyer through her growing self-esteem in the Bible studies and John Stott’s encouragement of her. So baptism is a symbol of new life, it is given to us to develop our mission and purpose and impact those around us for Christ’s sake.

THE SPIRIT GROWS US INTO THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST

The third word the Spirit- Jesus baptises us with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit grows us into the likeness of Christ. It is a circular motion but the Holy Spirit always points us to Christ. Another core empowering belief of champion South Africans is that they regard life as a never-ending adventure. That was/is certainly a description of Jesus. He regarded life as a never-ending adventure. If he lived in to-days’ time we would find him too extreme for us. He is a story, Matthew Charlesworth is a young man who graduated from Rhodes University with an honours degree in Computer technology. A devout Catholic he had always planned to join the Jesuits when he completed his degree. He joined them and was sent to Spain where the brothers split into pairs, took no food nor money and were sent out to traverse the whole of Spain on foot, to spread the good news. Just as Jesus had done with his disciples. Some people would see this as a waste of a capable, educated 25 year old reduced to begging. While others would see it as an adventure of faith. What adventure then does God have for you and for me that will grow us into the likeness of Christ in 2018?

HOWEVER WE HAVE A HABIT OF RESISTING ADVENTURE & WE HAVE SELF LIMITING BELIEFS

Sometimes we are self-sabotaging. It is helpful to look at our self-limiting beliefs about ourselves. Here are some of mine 1.) I limit myself by not thinking about what’s really important to me. 2.) I limit myself by not relaxing and giving myself permission to do so 3.) I limit myself by not allowing pleasure in my creativity. Those were just some of them-not all. I wrote out new possibilities. 1) I do have the discipline to succeed in my creativity and love it. 2) I can relax and give myself permission to do so, by the power of the Holy Spirit. By growing into the likeness of Christ by the Holy Spirit we can be sure we will be on a never ending exciting adventure.

END (SUMMARY)

Three words Beloved, Baptism and Spirit. Beloved- it is so important to know we are God’s beloved but it is more important to be a loving person than to be loved. Baptism- is the badge of new life, new life is a tangible asset that gives us a sense of mission to change the world around us. Our spheres of influence differ in size. Size is not the issue, but being people who make a difference to those around us, is the whole point about using the new life of baptism. The Spirit grows us into the likeness of Christ. Jesus always was and always is on a never ending adventure with purpose. Three words Beloved, Baptism and Spirit help us to remember we must cultivate new life in Christ in the New Year. Amen.