

## **SERMON: 10 January 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **The Baptism of the Lord**

**Mark 1:4-11**

**Acts 19:1-7**

Some of the things from this week might rightly ring a few alarm bells.

For example:

- Record numbers of Covid infections
- The POTUS behaving, inciting insurrection in his own country because he is a bad loser
- British company Tate & Lyle which used to have a big refinery in Greenock built on slavery and exploitation, has recently failed to properly compensate Cambodian families whose land was taken over to grow sugar cane for them

This is baptism of the Lord Sunday.

It's strange isn't it, that John said of Jesus, that 'I baptise with water but that he (Jesus) would come and baptise you in (or with) the Holy Spirit'.

And yet it's Jesus who submits to John, is baptised by him, and actually doesn't appear to have baptised anyone in his life time.

What then could it mean that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit?

It's interesting too, that John was out in the wilderness baptising.

When we think of baptism we might think of an ornate baptismal font in a church building and part of a often quite formal ceremony.

Not always, I remember being involved in a couple of baptisms in the sea, and they were very special, memorable occasions.

John's baptism didn't happen in the Temple. People had to go out to the wilderness to be baptised by this wild looking man, not a priest dressed in priestly clothing.

It reminds me of the presence of the Spirit at the beginning of creation.

The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2).

And God speaks and brings order from the chaos, light from the darkness, life from the void or emptiness.

Is that what God is doing with John and with Jesus and with us?

As Jesus steps into the muddy, waters of the Jordan River, is he stepping into the muddy waters of our lives, to bring order from the chaos, light from the darkness, life from the void?

Does he meet us in our own wilderness place, away from the centre, out in the margins, to bring a oneness with God, through the Spirit - a oneness sealed by water and Spirit?

Yes.

Where the Spirit is there is life.

We're joined to God and to one another in a life affirming connection which is continual, ever evolving, universal, holy and utterly transmissible.

In the baptism of the Lord, the Holy Spirit grows in us and through us from Alpha to Omega, beginning to end, from the beginning of the journey that is Christ to it's end point, which is also Christ.

Grace upon grace.

With the assurance of God the Father's love and pleasure - you are my dearly beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

That's the great mark of baptism - the assurance of the Father's love and pleasure.

It seems that the believers at Ephesus needed that reassurance from Paul when he and his friends visited. They knew that baptism of John - in other words, they knew they needed to turn from their sin and turn to God - but they had never heard of the Holy Spirit - they'd never gone beyond that living with a heavy sense of repentance. I think they were missing out on the assurance of the Father's love and pleasure, and this may have been as much as 20 years after Pentecost. They were yet to experience the full freedom of the Spirit.

For where the Spirit is there is life and freedom.

And so we see Paul being there to help. He's there to transmit the baptism of the Lord, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to lay hands on them and pass on the blessing to these others who were hungry to receive more.

In short Paul was now being Christ in the world to these Ephesian believers. Passing on the baptism of Christ and helping to transform more people's lives bringing order from their chaos, light from their darkness, and life from their emptiness.

When we're baptised in the Holy Spirit we're given an amazing gift of life to pass on to others which will give us all the assurance of the Father's love and pleasure, that the past is healed and forgiven, the present is full of grace and the future is in the hands of a loving God.

What peace and joy that brings to us in this often troubled world. And may such assurance strengthen us to face whatever the world throws at us in this coming week.