

**SERMON: 13 January 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

**“Overwhelmed by Love”**

**(Acts 8:14-17 and Luke 3:15-17, 21-22)**

This week, I came across these three quotations by Carl Jung and I think they serve well as an introduction to what we’re thinking about this week.

Jung was big on the idea of becoming who you truly are [SLIDE] and who you then choose to be [SLIDE]. And he made it clear that Jesus was the great example for all humans to copy [SLIDE].

So what might we copy from Jesus’ baptism? [SLIDE]

I think that perhaps the most important element of the baptism of Jesus is the fact that he heard the Overwhelming Voice of the Love of God the Father. [SLIDE]

We all hear voices. Sometimes in the middle of the night I’ll get up and go to the loo and this internal voice will whisper to me, ‘I’m not a very good person, I’m not spiritual enough, I’m not a good enough husband, or a good enough father, or a good enough minister.

Did Jesus hear such voices?

Maybe. But what matters is that he heard the Voice that matters.

‘This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased’. [SLIDE]

That Voice of approval was so necessary to Jesus and it’s so crucial for us too. Because, we are in Christ, which means, if Jesus needed it, then so do we, since he is the Pattern for our lives.

God, the Father’s Voice, does not say, you’re not good enough. It says, you are mine, therefore you are more than enough, you are beloved.

So many of us go through life with disapproval. It’s crucifying. It causes such trouble, in childhood and in later life. It can be the root of so much

bitterness and the cause of so much of our depression, anxiety, and insecurity.

If we haven't experienced approval we'll project disapproval onto everything else and everyone else.

But Jesus, the Anointed One, is the Pattern for a different way of life. The approval comes in the form of anointing or gifting from above, like an overwhelming force of good which washes over us.

This is why the word overwhelming is a good word to explain what baptism means. It's gives the idea of a drenching, or immersing, or a consumed, by a power which has the power to effect great change in us.

Its the Holy Spirit. It's the Anointing of God. It's the Presence of Grace, the experience of peace, the welling up of joy.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit has the power to wash us completely clean, or, as John puts it when he says that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire; it has the power to burn up all the dross or the chaff.

When we accept the baptism of the Holy Spirit we surrender ourselves to the life long process of change, in which the Spirit of Christ separates the grain from the chaff, the necessary from the unnecessary, the pure from the sin stained.

His fire burns the chaff so that only the grain is left. The chaff is overwhelmed by the grain because the fire of separation has been burning.

So when I wake up in the middle of the night, and I've been letting the Holy Spirit burn in me, I should more and more quickly hear the Voice of approval instead of any other voice.

And in turn, I should be quicker to pass on that Voice in the words I speak and in the way I live.

I think this is the normal evolution of faith, the growing up of faith. The process of becoming holy or Christ-like.

What matters, is to give space to the Voice, to listen to the Word of God, to make room for the Spirit to speak.

So Jesus is baptised, and having been baptised, Luke tells us that the heaven was opened (3:21).

Having been baptised mattered. Had he not been, I don't think he would have seen heaven open.

He had to submit to the process. He had to humble himself. He had to turn up and be there with all the others.

Maybe there's a lesson there for us. When we don't feel like joining with our fellow believers because the minister has chosen hymns that no one knows once again, or whatever reason. Maybe if we don't turn up, we won't see heaven open, we might miss the extraordinary.

Born as Jew, into a thoroughly Jewish family, Jesus didn't need to be baptised. Baptism was for sinners or outsiders who'd converted to Judaism.

But not only is this an act of humility, it is an act of identification as to who God is. Jesus identified with sinners and outsiders.

I wonder, to what extent we might be prepared to be identified with sinners and outsiders? It's a similar question to the one we posed last week. How far are we willing to travel?

It takes courage to go to those who are not like us. It takes courage to knock on the door of a stranger. It takes courage to strike up a conversation with someone from outside our tribe.

It helps to know that Christ is with us. But what does Christ mean?

When John the Baptist was out in the desert baptising people and calling them back to God, some thought he might be the Messiah, the Christ. John was quick to point to Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed One, the One on whom God's Spirit rested eternally.

Jesus shows us that Christ is both eternal and universal. In other words, Christ exists for all time, for all people, and for all of creation.

Because Christ is now with us - all of us, for all time - then all people are little Christs, who have the anointing of God, because Christ means to have God's anointing, which is God's approval.

C S Lewis used that term 'little Christs' when he said."Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else" [SLIDE]. So "(when) we let God have His way, (we) come to share in the life of Christ" - we are sons of God as Christ is the Son of God.

If we can see that the Gospel, the good news, now means that all people have God's approval, because of Christ, then this is going to make it easier for us to identify with sinners and outsiders, because we don't think of them in terms of 'us and them', but rather we are all 'us' in Christ.

Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. (Colossians 3:11)[SLIDE].

And, in Christ, we are one body, being brought together by amazing grace.