

Sermon 10 January 2021 Baptism of Jesus

Mark 1:4-11

Today we look at the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. Interestingly, this is the first appearance we read of Jesus as an adult. John has been predicting for some time that this person would make an appearance, this person who is far, far greater than him and that he would be baptising people with the Holy Spirit.

So sure enough, one day Jesus walks up to John and asks him to baptise him. As he does so, a dove, which is a sign of the Holy Spirit, settles on his shoulder and God's voice is heard, 'This is my Son and I am very pleased with him.'

The fact that God calls him his Son is important. Firstly, it affirms that Jesus is indeed his Son and not God himself. Secondly, it affirms Jesus as the Messiah. Several Biblical passages refer to the Messiah as God's Son. Psalm 2:7, the writer in referring to the coming of the Messiah, writes, *'The Lord said to me, "You are my Son. Today I have become your father."'* John 11:27, Martha says to Jesus, *'Yes, Lord, I have always believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God.'*

The baptism of Jesus takes place shortly before he began his ministry. Immediately after his baptism, he went into the desert for forty days where he experienced significant temptation and then his ministry got under way. So in a sense, his baptism is rather like a commissioning. Jesus receives God's approval ('I am very pleased with you. '), and he also receives God's power, as in the Holy Spirit, to equip him for his ministry.

The point I want to make this morning is that in baptism we are all commissioned to do God's work. What does this mean for us? What are the implications? It means that we are all disciples of Jesus. It means that we are challenged to spread God's love wherever we can. It means to give something of ourselves. As I have said before, it is often a case of attitude. If we have a caring, loving attitude, we will make a difference. Let me tell you a story.

A long time ago in China, a girl named Li-Li got married and went to live with her husband and her mother-in-law. In a very short time, Li-Li found that she couldn't get on with her mother-in-law at all. Their personalities were very different, and Li-Li was angered by many of her mother-in-law's habits, and in addition, she found her to very critical of Li-Li.

Li-Li and her mother-in-law never stopped arguing and fighting. But what made the situation even worse was that, according to ancient Chinese tradition, Li-Li had to bow to her mother-in-law and obey her every wish. All the anger and unhappiness in the house was causing her husband great distress.

Finally, Li-Li could stand it no longer and she decided to do something about it. Unfortunately, her proposed remedy was quite drastic. She went to see her father's good friend, Mr Huang, who sold herbs. She told him the situation and asked if he would give her

something to poison her so that she could solve the situation once and for all. Mr Huang thought about it for a while, and finally said, 'Li-Li, I will help you solve your problem, but you must listen to me and do exactly what I tell you.'

Li-Li agreed. Mr Huang went into the back room and came back with a package of herbs. He told Li-Li, 'You can't use quick-acting poison because that would cause people to become suspicious. Therefore, I have given you a number of herbs that will slowly build up poison in her body. Every other day prepare some delicious meal and put a little of these herbs in her serving. Now, in order to make sure that nobody suspects you when she dies, you must be very careful to act very friendly towards her. Don't argue with her, obey her every wish and treat her like a queen.'

Li-Li was so happy. She thanked Mr Huang and hurried home to start her plot of killing her mother-in-law. Weeks went by, months went by, and every other day Li-Li served the specially treated food to her mother-in-law. She was especially nice to her and treated her like her own mother.

After six months had passed, the whole household had changed. Li-Li had practised controlling her temper so well that she found that she almost never got angry or upset. She hadn't had an argument for months with her mother-in-law, who now seemed much kinder and easier to get along with.

The mother-in-law's attitude to Li-Li changed, and she began to love her like her own daughter. She kept telling her friends that Li-Li was the best daughter-in-law one could ever hope to have. And of course, Li-Li's husband was very happy to see the change in the relationship.

One day, Li-Li went to see Mr Huang. 'Mr Huang, please help me to stop the poison from killing my mother-in-law. She has changed into such a nice woman, and I love her like my own mother. I do not want her to die.'

Mr Huang smiled. 'Li-Li, there's nothing to worry about. I never gave you any poison. The herbs I gave you were vitamins to improve her health. The only poison was in your mind and in your attitude toward her, but that has all been washed away by the love you have been giving her.'

I feel it is so appropriate that we are encountering the story of Jesus's baptism at the beginning of a new year. This is a time when we often make resolutions for the year ahead, when we resolve to make changes or do things better. So what could be better than to resolve to serve Christ with all our might, and we can do that simply through our attitude. We can make a difference through our attitude. Just like the man with the pocket mirror in last week's story, we can bring about change in some people by bringing a little light into their lives with a little kindness and love. That's our commission for 2021.

