

**A Baptism
By
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Sermon at St Georges Pearce in November 2004

Luke 6:20-31, 2 Thess 3:6-13

Introduction

The passages we've heard are great passages to read in conjunction with a baptism.

[Later this morning, that's what we'll be doing, we'll be welcoming 3 new members into the church – Ethan, Laylah and Alexis will take their place in our midst, will join us in our mission, will remind us of our own baptismal blessing and calling.]

Baptism is the church's sacrament for celebrating salvation,
for acknowledging the divine love that graciously draws us back into relationship.

When we baptise someone, we *you* were baptised, you were immersed (symbolically) into the new life of Christ,
there was a dying and a rising.
You were marked on the forehead with the sign of a cross,
the symbol of your new identity, your new commission.

In a world full of symbols,
a world where the best known symbols are the dollar sign and the golden arches,
what does this particular symbol mean?
What does a 'cross life' look like?

Well in Luke 6, Jesus gives us a picture.
What does it look like? What does it mean to be baptised?

1. Seeing as God sees

Well for one thing, it means seeing as God sees.
Seeing things, seeing life from a divine perspective.

People refer to the kingdom of God as the upside-down kingdom.
That's because Jesus turns so many of the world's values on their head.

Take the issue of wealth, for example. (v20)
How does the world view wealth?
Well, judging by our society's priorities, you'd have to say, pretty highly!

Money! Status! Possessions! Power! Choice!
These are the exulted things,
we *despise* poverty, we *avoid* the poor, if we can.

And yet to God ... it's different.
God loves the poor,
and God commends the simple life,
the uncluttered, undivided, unselfish life of faith.

*'Blessed are you who are poor,' says Jesus,
for yours is the kingdom of God.'* (20)

ie Blessed are you when you see the shallowness of these worldly priorities,
when you see the poverty of a life devoted to accumulation and self-gratification.
Blessed are you when you realise that *simplicity* and *trust* and *generosity* and *standing
for something worthwhile* are the things that really matter.

Indeed, if outward failure or poverty help us to see this, and they often do,
then they are a blessing.

Friends, baptised people, if they are to live true to the mark of X,
will increasingly see the way God sees.

2. Act as God acts

And they will act. They will act the way *God* acts.

Despite living in the world
they will learn to laugh at its preaching,
to question its priorities,
to confront its logic.

The logic of the world is: self-first.
This logic works its way out in many destructive actions: revenge, domination,
accumulation, competition.
When someone hurts you, you hurt them back.
When someone takes something from you, or threatens to,
you do all you can to stop them,
you build fences, install security systems, become suspicious.

But again that's not how God acts.
In another shocking reversal Jesus says,
Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you...

In other words, let these difficult people, these exasperating experiences bring you to
your best.

When someone hurts you, gives you a hard time, gossips behind your back,
don't retaliate, channel the anger into prayer,
bless them, change the dance...

If someone slaps you in the face, take it.
Show them the power of patience.
When they scoffed and beat and spat on Jesus, that's what he did,
he took it....

If someone grabs your shirt, well, let them have it
and your coat!
Seize the initiative, make it a present.
Don't hold your stuff so close,
let it go,
let God look after you.

*If someone takes unfair advantage of you, well says Jesus,
use the occasion to practice the servant life.
None of this tit-for-tat stuff.
Live generously.*

If you act as the world acts then you just keep it all going,
the same old cycles, the same old problems.

As hard as it is, if you act like *God* acts,
if you live generously,
treat people *not* as they deserve but as you'd like them to treat you,
If you act like God acts, things happen...things change...the world becomes a better
place.

If you act like God acts, you plant a seed, you become a part of the solution

Remember the parables, seeds grow, *the kingdom* grows!
At first it's very hard to see.
But then one day there's a tiny green shoot ... and it grows,
and there's leaves,
and branches,
and finally fruit.
The birds come and build their nests and sing their beautiful songs.
The world becomes a better place.

Friends, every time you chose to act as *God* acts,
every time you show that little piece of restraint,
that graciousness in a difficult sit'n,
every time you go that extra centimeter in love
you plant another seed.

Don't be yourself, don't act as you *feel* like, that's a disaster!
Act like Christ, be a Christian.
That's your calling:
wherever you go,
whoever you meet,

however they treat you –
act as God acts. Plant kingdom seeds.

It's Ethan's calling, it's Laylah's calling, it's Alexis' calling.
To be a follower of Christ: to see as God sees, to act as God acts.
That's what it means to be marked with the cross.
It's a high and impossibly hard and holy calling.

Influencing others

One last thought, a question...
how are these young ones going to learn this?

Who's going to tell them?
More importantly, who's going to *show* them?
Who's going to inspire them with the story so radically different from the one they'll
learn in the playground?

Well, we know the answer, don't we?
It's us!
Their parents, their grandparents, their godparents, their church family.
We're the ones they'll be looking at,
the ones they'll learning from.

When Paul wrote to the Thess'ns he was acutely aware of the influence of other Xns.
Some were good, and some ... well ... *keep away*, says Paul (6),
keep away, they'll only lead you astray.

It's a sobering thought, isn't it?
The way we live - our values, our behaviour - it doesn't *just* affect us.

As they watch us, I wonder what Ethan and Laylah and Alexis will learn?

Will they learn to speak well of others,
to be patient, and kind, and generous?
Will they learn to forgive?

Will they learn about God?
Will they learning to worship, to serve, to give thanks?
Will they learn that people matter more than money or possessions or power?

What will we teach them?
It's important, because their outlook in the end
will have a lot to do with ours.

Of course we *all* fail, everyday,
it's not about being perfect (that's another thing they need to learn)

it's about being committed,
it's about getting up when we blow it, and saying we're sorry, and cleaning up the mess,
and letting God forgive us,
and having another go.

In 2 Thess 3, Paul is confident of his influence,
He urges the Thessalonians to imitate him. (7)

Friends, these young ones are looking to us.
In the midst of the confusions and temptations of their lives they'll be looking to us for
some leads, some bearings, some inspiration and encouragement.

Let's work hard to be the kind of influence we'd like these kids to follow.

Let's *not* weary in doing what is right.
Let's go for it, for this is our calling...
It's what it means to be marked with cross of Christ.