

## Sermon for 10<sup>th</sup> January 2010 Baptism of Christ (Luke 3:21-22)

Kevin and I braved the walk down to church on Thursday to check that everything was OK. And as I was walking in Kevin's footprints, knee deep in snow on the fields at the back of the Rose Lawn Hotel, some words came to mind:

In his master's steps he trod  
Where the snow lay dented  
Heat was in the very sod  
Which the Saint had printed.

Only it was more like Vicar and Reader forth they went, forth they went together. Now before Kevin gets any ideas above his station or thinks he is my Master, I'd better move on.

I've not had much time to prepare a sermon this week, to be honest, so you're just getting a stream of thought this morning. Some might be critical of me for not spending more time preparing a sermon for Sunday, and it's a valid criticism because proclaiming the Word is important. But I think I've been proclaiming the Word in a different way this week – in a rather more practical way, just as some of you have too. I've been making phone calls to check that people are OK and have enough food, visiting the elderly and those who are too nervous to venture out. And I've heard lots of stories of other people doing the same. People shoveling snow off the roads on the RAF estate, pushing strangers cars uphill or off or back onto their drive, making trips into Sainsburys to get fresh supplies for people, visiting vulnerable people, all sorts of ways people have helped others. And it's not only Christians that have done this, of course, there are lots of people in this community and all over the country that lend a hand to others when help is needed. But for Christians, this is not just a good deed that we might feel like doing today because there's snow on the ground, but it's a way of life that is defined by our faith and by our identity as followers of Christ.

Today, amid the snow, we celebrate the Baptism of Christ. This is the middle of a series of three Sundays of Epiphany time. Last Sunday we celebrated the Christ revealed to the nations, represented in the Magi. Today, he is revealed as the one anointed by God's Holy Spirit. Next Sunday we have the story of the wedding at Cana when his glory is revealed in the first sign and wonder he is to perform.

I'd like to point out three short things about today's wonderful story of Jesus' baptism from Luke:

- Baptism was not unknown in Jewish culture, it has its roots in the cleansing rituals following ordinary life events, like eating or childbirth. But because people are Jews by birth rather than conversion, baptism into the faith was unnecessary. But at the time of

Jesus it was customary to baptise Jewish converts 7 days after circumcision. Baptism was a sign that there was a fundamental change in a person, unlike the rite-of-passage rituals like bar mitzvahs

- So by Jesus being baptised, he is identifying himself with outsiders, not insiders, those on the fringe, not the in-crowd. Jesus' family heritage is cast iron, he's a descendant of King David, so his baptism is a sign of his deeply radical humility.
- Lastly, for Christians, baptism is both of these and more. It is a sign of radical change within us, if we submit to the working of God, the Holy Spirit, in our lives; it is an identifying with the outsider because Christ was an outsider and we identify ourselves as his; and it is a way of showing that we tread where our Master has trod before us - not in snow, but in the footsteps of Christ.

That's why shoveling snow and getting extra supplies in for other people, and checking up on the elderly and visiting the lonely, and all the other things we do are not just good deeds because we feel like doing a good deed today, and they're not just another form of social service for needy people. All these things are, for us, ways of identifying with Christ, ways of living out our faith in our lives, ways of living our baptismal identity.

The thing is, if we only do these things, and don't let other people know why we're doing them, or that we are part of the Church, they won't understand that Christ is behind all this - he's the one who makes us the kind of people we are. Yes, we need to get out there and do good, just as Christ did. Because it's God's path for us to be there for people in need. Or, as it says in the carol:

Therefore, Christians all, be sure  
Wealth or rank possessing  
Ye who now will bless the poor  
Shall yourselves find blessing.

But we have to tell people about it too, just as The Holy Spirit of God told Jesus at his baptism that he was chosen and precious to God. So the people out there also need to know that they are chosen and precious to God. So next time you get the chance, don't shy away from talking to people about God because you're a bit embarrassed. Use the opportunities God gives you to get to know people better and then help them to begin to understand that they too are precious to God. We have good news; we need to share it.

Blessings  
Gill