

Baptism talk 20/10/24

Mark 1:9-11

Those of you who know me well will be aware that I'm not an expert when it comes to technology. So, you won't be surprised to learn that I don't spend a lot of time on social media either. Although I do have a Facebook page, I rarely use it! I know before anyone else says it, it's a clear sign that I'm getting old. My excuse is that I genuinely have better things to do with my time than spend hours online.

Until very recently I was totally unaware of the social media phenomenon "Second Life". Apparently, it has been around for over 20 years, and I was surprised to learn that over fifty million people have created a Second Life character, with almost a million regular participants.

For those of you like me who are a bit out of touch, wondering what on earth I am talking about, Second Life is a virtual world. This virtual game provides, an opportunity to seek a second chance in life. 'Second Life' describes itself as a place 'to connect... to change yourself, to change your mind, change your look... to be different'.

For me the popularity of second life is symptomatic of a huge problem in our society, which affect many people today, the deep longing within us for a better-quality of life, which tantalizingly seems just out of our reach. Whichever direction you look to fulfil this deep inner longing it eventually proves inadequate.

But there is a solution, to this problem, that many people today have completely overlooked. Jesus said that he came that we might have real life. Becoming a follower of Jesus far from being boring irrelevant and untrue, is the way to the much better life we all dream of. Knowing Jesus is the way to filling that deep ache, that void, that hole in the soul, that we all have. God does not turn his back on us and write us off, even though we have turned our back on him.

God is the God of the second chance and third and many, many more. He gives us countless chances to turn back to him and enjoy his love again. God doesn't just give us a 'second life' – he comes to us and transforms our real life from the inside into something truly beautiful. How do we get this real life? Recognise our need and simply ask. I know it sounds too good to be true, we don't deserve it and we can't earn it, God freely gives it to us.

Baptism is a symbolic act, marking our decision to turn to Christ. In baptism we die spiritually to the old way of life, God washes us clean, he deals with all our guilt and those awful feelings of shame that eats away at us, which try as we might keep on niggling at us in the back of our minds, making us feel unworthy, preventing us from being the people that we would like to be. The Christian can let go of the past, it no longer has any hold over you, you are free to live a new life. The past is simply that- past!

As we emerge from the water, we are reborn spiritually, God washes away the past and we begin a new life in Christ, we become his followers, his disciple. If you are wondering what that word means, it simply means learner. Baptism is never the end of the journey, rather it is just the beginning.

As Christians, we commit ourselves to a lifelong journey of learning more about God's love, worshipping him, reading the Bible and pray, and sharing what we have discovered of God's love for us with others. Another important stage on that journey for Connor, Liz and Jess is confirmation, when you confirm the promises that you have made today to the Bishop, which is booked for next year, and we pray that, when she is older, Eva will also want to make that step of faith for herself.

Saint Paul put it this way in his letter to the Romans, by our baptism, then, we were buried with him (Jesus) and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also, we might live a new life.

But there's something else that happens when we are baptised. Notice, in our reading this morning, what happened when Jesus emerged from his baptism. The heavens were opened, and Jesus saw what looked like a dove that came and rested on him. In the bible, the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, God's special gift to all those who turn to him. The Holy Spirit brings us the assurance we need that God loves us and has forgiven us. The Holy Spirit also helps us to overcome our weakness, to change, to stop doing the things that displease God and instead become the people God wants us to. He gives us the strength to do what's right, to love other people just as God has loved us.

Well, there's one other thing which Mark tells us happened to Jesus, immediately after he was baptised. He heard a voice from heaven saying this is my son whom I love. God wants all those who have been baptised today to know for certain that they are now adopted into his family, that they are precious to him, and that he loves them and will never leave them. Jesus wants to reassure you that he is well pleased with you.

God is still calling man, women and children to follow him today. Is he calling you? How are you going to respond? As our Bishop, bishop Paul, likes to say there is nothing better that anyone can do with their lives than gave their lives to Jesus. What are you waiting for? You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Perhaps this morning I've raised some interesting questions that you've never thought about before, here at St. Mary's we run an alpha course, it's entirely free, and there's an opportunity to ask your questions, and to learn more about the basics of the Christian faith.

Connor, Elizabeth and Jess attended the alpha course in the summer, found it help then, and ultimately lead them to their baptism today.



We will be running the course again after Christmas and if you are interested go to our Contact Us page and fill in the Contact Form with your details. Click the SUBMIT button and I will get back to you and let you know when the course will start.