**Sermon Mark 1:4-11**

**Sermon videolink:** [**https://youtu.be/L7fOLQjOnZ4**](https://youtu.be/L7fOLQjOnZ4)

To the casual observer, baptism may look like nothing more than a religious ritual. The pastor places water on the person’s head and while doing so says a few simple words, “I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

It’s just water. They are just a few words. How can anything powerful be happening in such a simple act?

Yet somehow in that simple act, there is a great deal of hidden power. In that simple act, the person being baptised has their sins forgiven and is delivered from death and the devil. In that simple act, God grants the person being baptised eternal salvation. From that moment onwards whenever the person has doubts about their standing before God, all they need to do is remember their baptism and the gifts God promised them at their baptism and believe that God is true to God’s Word.

How can a little bit of water and a few words produce such an amazing result?

The answer is that it is not the water. The water is simple H2O. What produces the amazing results is God’s Word, the name of God that is spoken in combination with the application of the water. It has power because it is God’s Word, authorised and commanded by Jesus to be used in baptism.

Before Jesus went to heaven he commanded his disciples,

 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 28:18-20, NIV).

When the pastor applies that water and speaks the name of God, the pastor is authorised and commanded by Jesus to speak those words, and that is what gives them power. Those words carry the same power that was contained in the words God spoke in the very beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. Let’s hear it again from our first reading today,

 “the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light” (Gen. 1:2-3, NIV).

Merely by speaking, God spoke the whole of creation into being.

That is not all!

John tells us that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2**He was with God in the beginning. **3**Through him all things were made, (John 1:1-3, NIV). Then John tells us, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14, NIV). We know this Word made flesh as Jesus the Christ.

The Word made flesh, by whom everything was created, whom we know as Jesus the Christ, is the one who commanded us to baptise using God’s name. That is why baptism is powerful, because the words we use are words authorised by the Word made flesh.

But there is more.

When John the Baptist baptised Jesus, two things happened that did not happen to anyone else that John baptised. The heavens were torn open. Can you imagine that? When we look up we only see the sky, but the Word of God tells us there is another plane of existence that is known as heaven, that, we normally cannot see. The barrier between us and that plane of existence was torn open, and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. At the same time, a voice came from heaven saying to Jesus, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11, NIV).

When we are baptised in God’s name, the same thing now happens to us. The Holy Spirit descends upon us, as quietly as a gentle dove. The Spirit that was hovering over the waters in the very beginning of time, hovers over the waters of baptism and and is poured out upon us. The Spirit creates faith in our hearts, cleanses us and regenerates us, changing us into the faithful, loving people God has created us to be.

More than this, the Spirit who is poured out on us in Baptism is the same Spirit poured out on Jesus the Son of God. The Spirit was a sign that Jesus is God’s Son and the Spirit is a sign and a seal that we too are children of God, not by natural birth but through adoption by God our heavenly Father. Baptism in God’s name is adoption in God’s name.

I have seen Millie with her parents, and I am quite sure they love her dearly. I am also certain that they are pleased to have her as their child. I’m sure they felt that way even before she was born and that at her birth, they were exceedingly pleased. In the same way, in Baptism God confirms to us, through water and God’s Word, that God loves us dearly and that God is exceedingly pleased to have us as one of his children.

No small thing happened to Millie today, and because of what happened to her she can always look back to this day and be sure that she is loved by God, chosen by God, adopted by God, forgiven by God, and assured of an eternal future with God.

Of course, for her to be aware and receive the comfort of all those assurances and benefits she needs over time to get to know her heavenly Father. She needs to learn what it means to be one of God’s dearly beloved children and what it means to be part of God’s family. She needs to hear God’s Word and be reminded of her Baptism so that the Holy Spirit can sustain and build her trust in God’s love and promises.

It is not only newly baptised children of God that need this, those of us who have been baptised for many years, even many decades, also need to be constantly reminded of God’s love for us. That is why the Holy Spirit gathers us together to worship.

We don’t worship to serve God, we worship so that God can serve us. We gather together so that God can serve us by reminding us of our baptism as we begin worship in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We gather so that we are reminded that we are not always the loving people God has created us to be, but despite this God forgives us.

In worship, we are served with God’s creative, enlightening, and life-giving word. This Word shows us what loving our neighbour and loving God looks like. In worship, Jesus the Word made flesh, serves us with his body and blood, reminding us that God’s love for us is so exceedingly deep and wide, that he died for us. In and through that body and blood the Holy Spirit renews and strengthens our faith. As we leave worship God continues to serve us, by blessing us and empowering us to go back out into the world as God’s loved children, ready to love and serve each other and our neighbours.

Amen.

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz