

## Sermon Based on Mark 1 v 4-11

If you read the gospels, one of the things you find is how different each of them are. We have just had Christmas, but only Matthew and Luke even mention the birth of Jesus and even then from very different perspectives. Obviously, the gospels are all about the life of Jesus, but there are only a few circumstances that all of them mention. The death and resurrection of Jesus takes up a lot of the contents, but as for the rest there must have been something special that each of the writers felt it so important that they all wrote about it. The baptism of Jesus is one such occasion. Not a lot is said, but Mark puts into a few words the key things that happened.

We are not told if Jesus and John were alone when Jesus was baptised, but it is likely others were around. People came and went, no appointment system, but for Jesus it was important that he identified himself with ordinary people, with people like us. We don't know what others saw or heard though it is probable that whilst they saw Jesus being baptised, they would not have heard the voice from heaven that Jesus heard – after all if others had heard those words then their reaction to Jesus would have been different. John's gospel tells us that John the Baptist was given a message to tell him who Jesus was rather than hear that voice.

I was once told that whenever I preached - to say 50 people, then 50 people would hear a different sermon. Each of the people who came to be baptised by John came for a different reason. Each, perhaps through their conscience heard God's voice telling them that they needed cleansing from the person they were inside, so that they could become the person that God wanted them to be.

So maybe the 1<sup>st</sup> thing we can learn from this account is that God's message is for each us individually and we hear God's voice differently. On many occasions, folk have said to me in passing or on leaving church, a point that really struck them or made them think, and my thought is often – did I really say that? If we listen, God will speak.

William Barclay makes a 2<sup>nd</sup> point that for Jesus it was a moment of decision. For 30 years Jesus had been at home in Nazareth. He had learned his carpenter trade and done his duties at home, but he must have been aware that there was more he needed to do. He would have prayed to God for a sign and John, his cousin coming out into the wilderness with his message, was that sign. It was time to commence the task God had prepared for him. Everyone of us have times when we need to make decisions about our lives, whether to hear God calling to us, or a path to follow. John Oxenham wrote this –

*To every man there openeth  
A way and ways and a way;  
The high soul treads the high way,  
And the low soul gropes the low,  
And in between on the misty flats,  
The rest drift to and fro.*

The drifting life can never be a happy life and Jesus must have known when John came that the moment of decision had come. Life in Nazareth would have been good and safe, but he answered that call. What a challenge for each of us too.

A 3<sup>rd</sup> thing is that it was the moment of identity. Jesus did not need to repent of sins but here was John telling the people of a way back to God and for Jesus he wanted to identify himself with this message. From now on Jesus was taking on this message and more, telling of God's love and plan for bringing humankind back into a relationship with God. For me at least, and for all of us, is the question, can people see that I identify as a follower of God?

Lastly it was a time of reassurance. God never asks us to do something and leave us to flounder. For Jesus he heard that voice of reassurance and the Holy Spirit coming to fill, empower and assure. Mark reminds us that immediately after this Jesus went into a time of testing and it is a reminder that following God's path is never easy, but God has promised He will always be with us, helping, enabling and strengthening us on our path.

Amen