

Baptised by water and Spirit, 2 February 2014

Readings: Hosea 11:1 – 4, Mark 1:1 – 13

Rhetorical questions:

Who here has been baptised? Immersed in water or sprinkled with water. Who has been baptised in water?

Next rhetorical question: who has been baptised in the Holy Spirit?

My main point today is that we need both. We need both to genuinely experience Jesus' love in our lives. We need both to walk with Jesus in mission to our community and our world.

You might have a few questions of your own though.

Most of us know what baptism with water is. Baptism with the Spirit is probably less clear and definitely more controversial; at least it used to be. Many churches split because of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But many, many people came to faith in Jesus Christ because of it. The charismatic movement or the Jesus movement enabled many to experience a new freedom and a new power in the Holy Spirit along with their new found faith.

So what is baptism in the Spirit? Turn to your neighbour and see what they think.

The "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" is generally understood to be a second baptism, "in fire" or "power," spoken of by Jesus in Acts 1:8. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

John the Baptist promised that Jesus would baptise with the Spirit. Mark 1:7-8 "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Many see that baptism as something which follows accepting Christ. The disciples experience at Pentecost was a separate experience from their conversion.

Acts 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The immediate outcome of their baptism at Pentecost was speaking in tongues. The other result was boldness; boldness such as they had not experienced before. Peter stood up and quoted the prophet Joel:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. Acts 2:17,18

Some people say Pentecost was a one off experience specifically for the birth of the Church. Now, when people come to Christ, they are filled with the Spirit at the same time. But there are other Biblical examples of people being baptised with the Spirit after conversion.

Acts 8:14 – 17 “When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

In some cases, people were baptised with the Holy Spirit after they began following Jesus. Does that mean we all need to have an experience, separate from conversion, of being baptised in the Spirit? And is that all we need?

Well “maybe” and “definitely not”.

Many don’t know when they became Christ followers. It was a gradual process. For some of that process began at infant baptism. Others can’t say when it began but they now love and follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

I’d like to suggest that the baptism or filling of the Spirit can be a process in some instances.

At baptism today, we don’t just baptise in the name of the Lord Jesus only. We baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We specifically pray for the Spirit to come and fill the person being baptised. At confirmation the Bishop prays “God of mercy and love, new birth by water and the Spirit is your gift” and then has specific requests on behalf of the one being confirmed. There will be many other points in our journey when we, or someone on our behalf, will ask for the Spirit to fill us afresh.

Some people say that Jesus was baptised in the Spirit at the river when he was baptised in water by John. That could be true. It may also be that God the Holy Spirit was simply confirming something that was already true.

Recall the story of Jesus in the temple as a young boy. Scripture tells us his parents found him “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.” Luke 2:46 – 47 This understanding could only have come from the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand some people do have a separate experience of the Holy Spirit; an event that made a huge difference in their lives. I did.

That is never enough though. Someone said “We leak and so we need to be re-filled.” If it is a one-off experience, it is not all there is. Paul commands the church

at Ephesus to “be filled with the Spirit.” The original language has the sense of “be continually filled with the Spirit.”

Whenever and however it happened, Jesus was filled with the Spirit. At Jesus’ water baptism he was commended by the Father and the Holy Spirit. It gave him the power to do carry out everything the Father commanded him. We need the Holy Spirit for the same reason.

Today we are beginning a series of sermons from Mark’s gospel. Mark writes a hero story. Jesus is the hero. He’s the action-man at work fulfilling the mission of God. Mark’s gospel was the earliest of the four in our Bible.

The people of the time were familiar with gospel messages. I’m sure you know Gospel means good news. The term “gospel” was associated with Roman good news in Jesus’ world. When the Romans won a battle or a new Caesar was crowned, the gospel, the glad tidings were trumpeted out.

Mark’s gospel is good news, better news than the people had ever heard before. It builds on the news in the Old Testament. Mark begins with prophecies melded from Exodus, Isaiah, and Malachi (Ex 23:20, Is 40:3, Mal 3:1) to show that John the Baptist is the new Isaiah preparing the way for Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the one who will save the whole world; the whole of creation; the whole universe.

As we go through Mark’s gospel I want us to know this Jesus in a deeper way. I want us to experience with him, some of the things he did. I want us to see things from his perspective as far as possible. I want us to know, deep, deep down in our spirits, how much he loves us. And I want us to understand and embrace his purpose. Let’s focus on Jesus.

Imagine Jesus in the river Jordan.

Was he conscious of the people gathered around, chatting, waiting their turn?

Or was he focused on what he was doing?

Was there a breeze as he stripped off his outer garment?

Was the water cold when he walked into the shallows?

Was the sun shining; could he feel the warmth on his back?

Was he excited, knowing his baptism marked the beginning of his public ministry or was he apprehensive knowing what his ministry would bring?

We don’t know the answers to those questions. We do know Jesus saw and heard something amazing. He had a wonderful experience that set the foundation for all that would follow. What happened was a response to an earlier plea recorded in Isaiah 64:1 “Oh that you would tear the heavens open and come down to make your name known to your enemies and make the nations tremble at your presence, working unexpected miracles.”

Mk 1:10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw that plea being answered; heaven was torn open. The light of a thousand suns must have shone. And the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove.

Jesus knew the presence of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit with him during the previous years of his life. He says “..the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.” John 5:19 Jesus was part of the Holy Trinity. He knew the presence of God.

And yet now, he experiences the presence of the other two persons of the God-head in a physical way. You will have seen pictures of Jesus baptism. Often he has his arms spread wide. There’s a sense of submission and acceptance here. Jesus accepts and welcomes the fullness of God through the presence of Father and Spirit.

We don’t know whether Jesus felt the wind as the Spirit’s wings moved or felt the Spirit land on him. We do know he saw the Spirit and heard the voice of the Father “You are my beloved Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.” Mathew records the voice as saying “This is my beloved son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.” Mark and Luke have God addressing Jesus. John’s gospel records John the Baptist seeing the Spirit but doesn’t say whether he heard the voice or not.

We can’t be too pedantic about whether God addressed Jesus directly or whether he spoke to the people. But Jesus heard the voice of God and he experienced the depth and power and affirmation of God’s love for him.

Imagine what it would be like for you to feel that depth, that power, that affirmation. God the Father loves you that same way. Jesus came because of that same love. He came to save the whole world, yes. And Jesus came to live, to minister, to die because God, the Holy Trinity, loves you, adores you, is pleased with you and wants you to be with him.

That experience of God’s anointing, or baptising, or anointing, whatever you want to call it, was foundational for Jesus whole ministry. Immediately after this experience, Jesus goes out into the wilderness where he is confronted with the reality of evil. That too is part of the foundation for his ministry as he withstands all that is not of God. In that hard place Jesus affirms what God has called him to do and he shuns the things that would distract him from the mission of God.

God wants us to know the same powerful love that Jesus knew. He wants us to know it so we can enjoy intimacy with him. He wants us to know how loved we are so we are not trapped by evil or foolishness. He wants us to know how loved we are so that his love overflows to all around us.

Often we get freaked out about mission or witnessing. We don’t have to be scared or apprehensive. All we need is to know the love and power and affirmation of God as Jesus did. That happens as we are baptised in water. That baptism is the outward sign of our decision to be a Christ follower. Knowing the love, power and affirmation

of God also happens as we are baptised, or filled, or anointed, whatever you want to call it, with the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to be a Christ follower on a daily, hourly, moment by moment basis.

Dwight Moody was to have a campaign in England. An elderly pastor protested, "Why do we need this 'Mr Moody'? He's uneducated and inexperienced. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?" A younger, wiser pastor rose and responded, "No, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr Moody."

The Holy Spirit wants a monopoly on us. It is happening bit by bit. God is doing mighty things in and through us. When I hear people from outside our church saying things like "Your church is doing good things," "I can't believe people would give up Christmas Day with their family for us." I know that God is overflowing us with his Spirit and I am excited.

We have been considering and reviewing our mission statement for a while now. It is looking more and more like we will settle on "Loving Jesus; Building Community." The second action flows from the first. When we love Jesus, truly love him, community happens, community is strengthened, others are touched and transformed by the love of God.

There is much to be done:

Lunch on the Hill, Messy Church, Friends n Fun, Girl's Brigade all need people to build relationships with those from outside church who come. Our new building has to become a higher priority because we are desperate for space; space to minister that is attractive and inviting.

But we mustn't fall into the trap of running. We simply need the Lord to fill us with his Spirit so that like Jesus, we can focus on loving God. Then we will have the boldness, the power, the money, everything we need to walk and work with him.

We must keep our hearts open to new ways that God wants to fill us. We mustn't be like the Israelites Hosea addresses.

Loving God, we know you lead us by your Spirit with cords of human kindness,
with ties of Jesus' love. Lift us, as the little children we are, to your cheek. May we experience you bending down to feed us. Fill us with the boldness, the power, the life of your Holy Spirit so that we can love the others whom you love also. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Blessing

Disturb Us, Lord

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show Your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.
We ask You to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

Attributed to
Sir Francis Drake