

# Second Sunday after the Epiphany

16th January 2011

*Isaiah 49:1-7, Psalm 40: 1-11,1 Corinthians 1:1-9, John 1:29-42*

In the name of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Last week we celebrated the feast of "The Baptism of our Lord" and we had Sienna's baptism in the service. This week we celebrate the baptism of Sam and Jack; and, as if to accommodate our calendar of events, the lectionary for both Sundays makes reference to the baptism of Jesus by John. Sceptics name such occurrences as 'coincidence', those of faith will nod knowingly as if they understand, and we who are alive to the mystical nature of life will seek to explore and 'read' what is being revealed to us in this underlining of Baptism.

That the readings of the day align with the events of the day is itself a sign – signifying that the Holy Scriptures belong in the present, in the moment and not in the past. More than that, the Scriptures and the narratives we read are not about others, they are about us, an "us' that is part of an 'all' that extends beyond both time and place.

So before we explore the actual readings, let's underline the notion of who we are as 'part of an all'. When we look at our lives, our day-to-day living, we generally only see the obvious. Consider for a moment what Sam and Jack have in common with Stuart, Beryl's husband and also with Wally, Janice's father. Sam, Jack, Stuart and Wally – listen again to the words from the liturgy of baptism:
"*Pour out your Holy Spirit in blessing and sanctify this water so that those who are baptised in it made be made one with Christ in his death and resurrection. May they die to sin, rise to newness of life, and continue forever in Christ Jesus our Lord....*"

The movement of dying and rising is the very tide of life itself, the ebb and flow that illuminates the power of love. Birth and death are not the Alpha and Omega. Rather, they bookend our experience, our normal, everyday sensate experience; they contain the obvious nature of life, but do not contain nor constrain the eternal nature of love, which is illuminated in the symbolism and ritual of baptism, in the movement of dying and rising.

We're coming to the readings, but first, one more comparison. What is it that Jews and Christians hold in common? Well, both have read and venerated the Holy texts we read from today; and, both have read them and understood them from the same perspective, for both see themselves and only themselves, as God's chosen. Isaiah

speaks of *"the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel..... who has chosen you."* [v7] and it's easy to see how a simple and understandable translation by the 'people of Israel' leads to them seeing themselves as God's chosen.

Paul speaks of "*...the church of God... those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*" [v2]. And as the Roman Catholic Church seeks to align enough miracles to make John Paul II the next saint, so we again see a simple and understandable translation of the text.

In our exploration of the text, in the present, if we seek to encounter the living Word of God, we might start by asking of ourselves 'who is /who are God's chosen' and who are called to be saints? Now, we could skip the rest of the sermon, for my guess is you're already one step ahead! The answer's going to be Sam, Jack, Stuart, Wally, and then of course all of us, and then everyone else. And that's right; these are God's chosen, we are God's chosen, all are God's chosen, and all are called to be saints. And it's from that perspective that we might approach the Scriptures once again.

So now let's take a moment to explore the text from this more open perspective. *"Listen to me"*, Isaiah cries, *"in my mother's womb God named me. The LORD called me before I was born...."* The popular movement in life – that journey that we're all on - is a movement forward; it's a seeking what we will become before we die (or rather maybe what will we accumulate before we die). What we will be 'when we grow up'. And that's a right and natural orientation; it is obvious. What is not so obvious is to seek 'your original face, the face you had before you were born'. To seek what Isaiah is crying out to us. And what is the calling that Isaiah speaks of? As we read on we hear, *"he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.""* To re-translate this so that we avoid the obvious geographical misinterpretation, it reads, *"You are my servant, chosen in the womb, in whom I will be glorified."* And in our baptism we are all called *"out of darkness into God's marvellous light";* we are called to *"shine as a light in the world to the glory of God."*

As we move forward in life's ebb and flow, so our world is shaped by our actions and our actions are shaped by our being and our orientation. It is important to ourselves and to each other, to revisit our calling, the being we are called to be from before our birth till after our death.

When Paul refers to those called to be saints, he is addressing all who will read and hear his letter. In v2 he also seeks to go beyond the walls of the Church in Corinth with "*together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours".*

This orientation to go beyond an obvious perspective of God's chosen is further reflected in the narrative of Jesus and John in the gospel. John recognises "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!";* he does not see in Christ a 'Christian God', nor a Messiah for the "people of Israel". John speaks of a revelation for all, to

all and of all. And John knows his calling; he is true to his being a servant that leads to a greater fullness for all. He doesn't see that fullness in himself, but rather his calling is to see himself as a part of the action that will bring the 'all' into fullness.

Jesus shows the way in his very being, in his life; he continues on his way – read the dialogue again – he doesn't get waylaid by John's disciples who look to him in wonder and question who he is, he continues on his journey. And his question to John's disciples is very simple: "*What are you looking for?*" It is a question of orientation; to find the answer they must know their own calling.

Jesus, continues his journey, in turn they follow. He stays in integrity with his life orientation, an orientation that was heralded before his birth – that's the Star of Christmas. It was heralded after his death in the empty tomb. And those who get it, those who see that orientation, that integrity with 'before I was born and after I die' – those who get it are changed. They are called themselves to be renewed, to take a new direction, and to be renamed: *"You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas*"

Today we celebrate that same movement in naming Sam and Jack, and in encountering again, in looking again into our own baptism. It is a baptism of movement, for ministry. Somehow it is a mystical ritual that gives us a glimpse of life beyond the obvious..

In a few minutes we will find in the symbolism of the Eucharistic elements what John found; *"Here'* in this place, *'is the Lamb of God"*.

May we also find what Simon found: a newness of life that enables us to know ourselves as saints.

The Lord be with you
Peter Humphris