

What does our baptism remind us of during these challenging times?

A message reminding us about the various aspects of our baptism and all that this means for our Christian journey during these challenging times.

10/1/21

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Let us pray:

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and may also have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Who liveth and reighneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

An extract from today's Gospel reading:

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice said from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

(Mark 1: 10-11)

I recently came across a document posted on the United Nations website detailing various responses to Covid-19.

The article in question is titled, "Adaptation and teamwork, the lessons of the pandemic: health personnel."

And I quote...

As the pandemic continues to rage, it is making clear that people around the world are surprisingly alike. No matter what divides us, gratitude for health care personnel for their titanic work is one thing we all have in common. In their name, authorities around the globe have asked people to follow the recommendations, to ignore false information and to protect them from discrimination. Their dedication to their calling has inspired the rest of us to help them succeed by doing our part.

The story of Andrea Bernal is one of hundreds of thousands. Doctors and nurses applauded her when she was discharged from the Juárez Hospital in Mexico City after an eight-day fight for her life. That fight will continue as she recovers, but despite the rigorous isolation measures doctors ordered, she will finally see her family. Her gratitude to the health personnel who saved her life is absolute. "Thank you," she said simply to the hospital's doctors, nurses, laboratory workers, social workers, administration, laundry, reception staff, and everyone who works to cure the body, but also the spirit of the patients and their families. "They are very careful; they encourage us every day so that we can be better. Every time we are desperate, they give us encouragement," she explains.

Above all, teamwork is essential to face the pandemic.

"We are all part of a team. As a society, those outside are helping to save lives by staying at home. Those here in the hospital are helping those who are already sick. We are a synergy and we must work as a team. Allowing ourselves to be divided in this global crisis has consequences that are often deadly."

<https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/hospital-mexico-adapts-fight-covid-19>

A few years ago, here at St Paul's, I wrote a detailed sermon exploring the theology around baptism and the implications it has for our mutual journeys in the faith. I was reminded of that sermon over past week, as I spent time meditating on the message for this morning. That previous sermon on baptism is available for your perusal on both the church website, as well as my personal sermon website.

Here is the link should you wish to reread that sermon. It is the basis for the extended message this morning where we will explore the meaning of our baptism in the light of the current global pandemic and all that this means for the world at large.

<https://reverendfatherdarronjohnmisplonssermons.wordpress.com/2017/06/26/jesus-john-and-our-baptism/>

There is a lot we can take from the story of the baptism of Jesus, as related to us in the Gospel of Mark. Baptism remains central to our Christian journey and I believe that it is healthy and productive for us to be reminded of the importance of this sacrament occasionally.

But what does our baptism mean to us specifically during this time of the global pandemic?

Does our baptism take on a special meaning for us that we need to explore and be aware of?

Could a reminder of our baptism be a way of refreshing ourselves spiritually when many of us are exhausted both mentally and physically?

These are some of the questions I would like to touch on this morning.

The first aspect we need to be reminded of is that our baptism into the Christian Faith is fundamental to our spiritual journey. It is a new beginning and therefore a new start, not only in our spiritual life but also in our lives as a whole. We become a new person for God through Christ. Through the sacrament of baptism we take certain vows and make certain promises to which we become accountable, both to God and to our fellow brothers and sisters. We are a chosen people for whom Jesus died on the Cross. By partaking in our Christian baptism, we become part of the universal saga of God incarnate where His blood freed us from our sins and we have the privilege of enjoying salvation and eternal life.

So the first aspect we need to be reminded of about our baptism is that we are firstly accountable to God. He has made promises to us and He has kept them. Always. We have now, through our baptism, made promises to Him. Have we always kept our promises? There has never been a more important time for us to remember the promises of our baptism. If we are able to do this, then we stand firm as Christians, no matter the onslaught of a pandemic or any other crisis we may encounter during our life here on earth.

The second aspect we need to be reminded of about our baptism is that we are also accountable to one another. We do not worship in isolation or as an individual. We are all part of the body of Christ and therefore we are one. Through our baptism we become part of the church of God and therefore part

of a special team where we are able to support and love one another, no matter the challenge, no matter the crisis – think global pandemic. So, our baptism becomes like an integral network where we are first accountable to God and then, secondly, accountable to one another. The two go together. This is what makes the Christian community so unique and so strong. We stand as individuals in the Christian faith together. United we stand and divided we fall.

Think for a moment of the true reflection I shared with you earlier on regarding the medical staff in a hospital in Mexico. I have read stories like this from all over the world, including South Africa, as I am sure that you have too. Medical teams have only survived the Covid-19 surge and second wave because they stood together, firstly as human beings and secondly as medical professionals. If they had chosen not to stand together, can you imagine the increased death rate that we would be sitting with today? These front line workers have repeatedly put the needs of others first, often to the detriment on their own mental and physical lives.

What lessons can we learn from this today?

The powerful lesson that we can learn from this today is the reminder that many of us need, is that when we stand together (with our baptism in Christ being our unifying factor) then we are able to be much stronger than we ever were. Most of us are not medical personnel, but we are still on the frontline in terms of dealing with people and Covid-19 every day. We can and we do make a difference, but we cannot do it on our own. As Christians in the Church of God, we have this invisible yet powerful line joining us all together, all the time, no matter where we are and what we are doing. It is called our baptism and it is what keeps us anchored and steady in the prevailing winds of Covid-19.

So my challenge to you all this morning and indeed to myself is that we need to remind ourselves, on a daily basis, of the miracle, joy and power of our baptism in and through Jesus Christ. This is the manna that feeds us. This is what binds us; this is what protects us through the Holy Spirit. It is this very same sacrament that empowers and strengthens us. When we are feeling low and challenged, when we are feeling overwhelmed, when we are feeling

mentally and physically exhausted, it is during these times of need that we must remind ourselves of our baptism, what this means to God, ourselves and one another. This reminder of this special sacrament then becomes a way of refuelling and re-energising ourselves with the aid of the Holy Spirit, just as the dove descended on Jesus... so too can the dove of love repeatedly descend upon us too.

I am reminded of the beautiful words of a chorus that I used to sing when I was a teenager many years ago...

Bind us together, Lord
Bind us together
With cords that cannot be broken
Bind us together, Lord
Bind us together
Bind us together in Love

There is only one God,
There is only one King
There is only one Body,
That is why we sing. **|| Bind us ||**

Fit for the glory of God,
Purchased by His precious Son
Born with the right to be free
For Jesus the victory has won. **|| Bind us ||**

We are the family of God
We are the promise divine
We are God's chosen desire
We are the glorious new wine. **|| Bind us ||**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6TdMMJEZs0>

What do you and I take away today?

You are loved immensely by God.

You are loved immensely by one another.

Our baptism reminds us of both of the above.

Together, we can make a difference in the world.

I wish you and your loved ones a peaceful and blessed Sunday.

With much love

Fr Darron.

