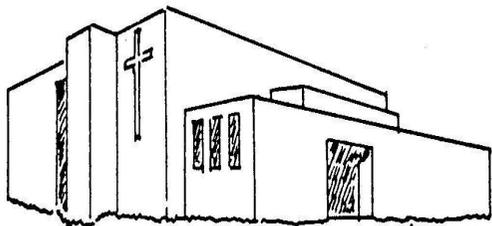


Barnsley Baptist Church 15th October 2017



Baptismal Service

Scripture Mark 8.v.31

Preacher: Rev. Ken W. Jefferson

Introduction

As some of you know, my father was, for most of my boyhood, a railwayman. I grew up to a rhythm, most of the working people of Barnsley knew, as part of their life style. This is to say I grew up getting used to the rhythm of shift work. I can remember it still. The pattern we had was shifts that ran from 6am till 2.p.m; then 2.p.m. to 10.p.m. and after that 10.p.m to 6am. This was the pattern that regulated the life of our family for some years.

Of course, the advantage we had, was, that we had rail travel concessions. I thought about them this week when I travelled up to Gretna to collect our grandson Jack, bringing him down here for a few days. No such door to door service when my sisters and I were small. When we travelled south by train then completed a journey bus, then we walked.

And on the train section of the journey, which was

usually fine, even exciting at times, there was one thing we dreaded. This was when the train came to an extended stop at one of the small stations. We would sit in the carriage, hoping against hope. that the guard would not start calling out in a loud voice, "All change.'

Well, here this morning, if there is one thing that we should understand, it is this. We are where we are today, with three candidates about to be baptized, and they are here, because, though they perhaps were not expecting it, to them there has come a voice, an inward voice saying to them- "All Change.'

It is a voice, the voice of the Lord that they were not expecting to hear. Kevin told me that he had rarely been in a church for years, but on an Easter Sunday morning. he felt an inner compulsion to attend a church service, a compulsion he tried to resist, but he felt he couldn't do so, and he found himself worshipping here on Easter Sunday, and his journey to a personal and public commitment to Christ had begun.

Ben heard the voice of a pastor calling him from across the street, where he stood in the rain, inviting him to come and join us in worship, and then he had an invitation to find a place among us, and learn something of the gospel we share, and then to wait until things became clear to him and He could make an informed response to the call of Christ, which in due time he has done.

I met Toni when her friends brought her to see me within the early days of becoming a follower of Jesus and was thrilled to hear how she was responding to the call to become a disciple of Jesus.

So our friends are here because they have made and are making their response to Jesus, and when Jesus says to any of us, "Follow me!" this is fundamentally a call that says "All change."

He calls us to a decision. When Jesus was nearing the end of His ministry on earth, He set out the terms of discipleship, not just for those who had already been following Him and learning to become disciples, but for anyone and for everyone wanting to become His disciple. He set out the terms very clearly, terms that would never be and never can be altered, no matter who the person desiring to be a disciple happens to be. The terms of reference are the same in their content and their cost. It doesn't matter where life has placed us, whether we are rich or poor, whether we are flying high in life or just about managing, whether we are young, not so young or positively ancient, it is absolutely the same across the board, and can't be altered to suit anyone's personal preference.

And these are the terms of discipleship, If anyone would come after me, He must deny himself, and take up his Cross and follow Me.' Let's hear it again. If anyone would come after Me, he must deny Himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.'

Now if this signals anything it absolutely signals "All Change, doesn't it?" There is nothing that changes life more for us that having to deny ourselves. Having to say no to ourselves, to our preferences, to our choices, to stop orchestrating life to suit ourselves, (making sure that we are in control,) -is not something that immediately appeals to us. We want to be the masters of our own lives, and we don't like interference. If there is a battle we have to fight, it is the battle to overcome self-centredness. Getting the centre of gravity

shifted away from ourselves is something that any of us rushes to do.

When Jesus put the call to self-denial first, the disciples who were closest to Him, didn't buy into what He was saying. Not long after He gave this teaching they were travelling to Capernaum, and he heard them arguing on the road. He asked them what the substance of their argument had been, but they didn't want to spill the beans, because they had been arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom Jesus would establish. Place, position, recognition, respect. But Jesus laid it out so very clearly. "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.

Our Salvationist friends here this morning should know that in the early days of the Army General William Booth wanted to impress this message of Jesus upon his officers. He sent a message to them around the world. There wasn't much finance for such a thing, so they received a one word telegram, and the one word telegram said what? It said "Others."

Being called to follow Jesus, is a call first of all to self-denial, a call that is enabled because the centre of our selves has been changed. Scripture says, "If anyone is in Christ Jesus, He is a new creation, the old has gone- the old life centred in the self has gone, it is buried with Christ in baptism, and the new has come, we are raised to newness of life by the Lord, to a life that puts Christ first. That old life is nailed to the cross with Christ and a new life, a life surrendered to Christ, a life of obedience to Christ, a life that lives to please Him and not ourselves takes over.

All change. Jesus said that if anyone wants to

follow Him he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me

This is the decision that initiates change. Jesus said that denying oneself is to be followed by the demand to take up the Cross.

I really don't think we appreciate just how incredibly devastating these words of Jesus are. When he said them, they must have sounded totally repugnant to his disciples. It was bad enough that he had spoken about the necessity of His own suffering and death as a prelude to his resurrection. His disciples didn't want to hear this type of thing, Peter tried to restrain Jesus. But now Jesus went so much further and talked about taking up a cross.

A cross? A cross? A cross was not something any Jew wanted to hear about. A cross was a death instrument. A cross spoke about condemnation and failure. They saw those who fell foul of the Roman law being led to their place of execution. They saw the shame of it. They saw the pain of it, the hurt and the humiliation of it, and yet Jesus dares to say that those who follow Him must take up their cross and follow Him. What did he mean by using such an unthinkable image.

Jesus was saying to His disciples, following me requires a commitment that costs not less than everything. Following me means a willingness to surrender all that you are, nothing, not even life itself must be regarded as dearer than following Me. Taking up your cross means taking the road that I am taking the road of suffering love, and all its cost.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor, puts it quite simply when he says, "When Jesus call

a man, He bids him come and die."

And this again is the emphasis we have in baptism. When we are baptised we are baptised into the death of Christ. We are saying that we fully recognise that before we can enter into the great fullness of Christ we have to meet Him In the Cross. We enter into the fellowship of His suffering before we enter into the fellowship of His resurrection. We know what the Cross has done for us. We know that it was on the Cross that Jesus died for our sins. It was there He secured our salvation. It was there that He secured our forgiveness and our freedom. We are saved and blessed by the Cross and now we must live as disciples of the Cross, bearing as Jesus did the shame of the cross.

This is the cost of discipleship. It is a cost that is real today. Let me say to our candidates today, if you keep to the promises you make today, the promise to follow Jesus and to carry your cross, don't expect to be thanked for your trouble. Our world does not want the message of the cross. Our world has no place for the cross. Our world wants to be rid of the message of the cross. It does not understand and does not want to have or to hear the message of the Cross. And if you are going to live as a disciple of Jesus, what you are and how you live will challenge unbelievers and they will not make life easy for you.

But remember this Jesus never sought to call, us to an easy life. He didn't lure us by false pretences. He called us to a way of life that He fully embraced Himself and He will be with us all the way, giving us grace and strength to follow where He leads. And the closer we get to Jesus, the deeper we will have

to go into the mystery and meaning of the cross.

The apostle Paul who was so committed to knowing Jesus and making Him Known, a man who knew what it was to suffer for preaching the message of the Cross, could say, 'All I care for is to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, being made like Him in His death, and so somehow becoming like Him in His resurrection. (Phil. 3.11.)

All Change. Jesus said that alongside the decision to become a disciple, and embracing the cost of discipleship, there is the commitment to discipleship.

In bible study this week we were dealing with Jesus and His calling of His first disciples. Was that radical or was that radical. Jesus appeared on the scene and assumed an authority to call the disciples to leave all they had known, their established way of life, and to throw in their lot with Him, allowing Him to determine the shape of their future. He called them to follow, to run after Him, to get in behind him. They weren't offered a neat detailed contract, or given a tidy job description, nor did they ask for one. They were invited to as it were burn their boats and take to the road with Jesus.

Now let me share with you one of the biggest mistakes that a preacher can make. Do you know what it is? It is the mistake of suggesting that this is not the way things work anymore. It is the mistake of suggesting that the notion of Jesus just coming and turning someone's life upside down is a thing of the past. **This is frankly complete rubbish.** The fact of the matter is that Jesus can step into your life and into mine just as radically

today.

Here is a young friend of mine. He is a doctor. He is happily married and has a young family. He is also established in a rather up market practice. Suddenly and entirely unexpectedly He finds the lord stepping into is life, and one year later he is established as the lead doctor in a hospital in Malawi. Here is a man who has retired from his practice as a vet. He and his life are fit and well and looking forward to retirement and enjoying the sports to which they are very committed. But what happens. The Lord has other intentions for them. Suddenly the work that they have done with Gideons is to be extended as the Lord calls them to go to Central Asia and to get involved in missions work that they had never seen themselves doing.

Or here in much more immediate terms is someone who is working in the city of London. He is a young man with so much ahead of him, but just before he gets involved in the world of finance, quite unexpectedly He feel the Lord's hand upon his life. He goes into the world of finance and within a short time has a big responsibility, but all the time he knows this is not his place, and he hears and responds to the call to ministry, and this morning he is heading up one of the most strategic Baptist churches in the North West.

Let me share words of really basic truth. None of us is remotely secure. Not one of us is too sheltered for the Lord to reach us, The Lord can call, the Lord does call at anytime to anyone He needs.

And this is something to which baptism points us. When anyone is baptized this does not mean that everything is done and dusted. It is not a matter of coming to a full stop now that the

ceremony has been git through. Baptism isn't an end it is a beginning and ahead of you is a life of responding to Jesus.

This I can promise you. If being a follower of Jesus ever becomes tame and dull, it won't be His fault, it will be yours. If it loses its capacity to stretch you and make you think differently, act differently, or find joy in service, then get back to the basics of it quickly, and see that Jesus never calls anyone to take life easy, but to a life and a lifestyle that can be as dangerous as it is dynamic.

This is not complicated. It is a step by step discovery that life changes when you place all that you are and all that you hope to be in the hands of Jesus.

And here is the great part of it. When you are a disciple it is not a matter of you offering your self to Jesus it is discovering that he has offered Himself to you. Jesus said, "Follow me."

It is a call that invites us even as it commands us to give Him not part of ourselves but all of ourselves in humble obedience. There is much in us that would make us less than inclined to take this much of a risk.

We might say we are unworthy, that we don't have outstanding abilities, and offer up other kind of rational reasons for resisting. But we will find to our amazement that following Jesus is the most liberating, fulfilling, kind of life. We will rarely have a precise map of where He is leading us but it will be enough to know that He is ahead of us, calling us forward into an ever deeper relationship with Himself.

He calls us to lose our lives, but in the losing of them we shall in fact find them (Illustration)

I was learning something about a famous conductor of a major Russian orchestras Valery Gergiev. There was a time when he was emerging as a truly wonderful pianist, but someone who was tutoring him could see something else in him. He could see his love for music was even greater than his love for the piano, and he felt that Valery should make the transition from soloist to conductor. But the transition would come at a heavy price. He would have to lose himself to the study of vast amounts of music. He would have to study and study and then some. But if he did so he would become, as he has become a master of the Orchestra in demand all over the world. He had to lose his life, in order to find it which he has

So it is we have to own one love above all other loves, the love of the Lord Jesus for whom we have to be willing to risk not less than everything, but in the losing of ourselves, for His sake and the gospels, we will find ourselves made more complete in the service of Jesus than we could ever have been elsewhere.

Conclusion

Our three friends are baptized today, upon their confession of faith in Christ, and I want to say this to you, as you come up out of these waters today, as you rise in the words of scripture, to newness of life, remember this. The very essence of the life to which Jesus has called you is risking and spending life, not trying to hoard it and keep it for yourself. He calls you to a life of service and self giving not self protection. He calls you to the best way of all, the way of following Him and His example, even as

you enjoy His presence and His power enabling to live a life which even if its outward seem scarcely any different, you know that inside your heart it is a matter of all change!