

ORDER OF SERVICE - Sunday 10th January 2020 – Baptism of Jesus

And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:11

GETTING READY

Welcome to Brunswick Uniting Church, my name is Saide. Just a few housekeeping matters before we start:

- Sign in
- Spread out.
- Masks on (including for singing)
- No morning tea but stay on to chat

CALL TO WORSHIP

Saide

God's voice is powerful, full of majesty
God's voice comes in the form of a dove.
God's voice speaks to us in creation.
In all of these ways God speaks to us of love.
Come let us worship this God with our voices
With our hearts, with all that we are.

SONG: Guide me, O thou great Redeemer, TiS 569

1. Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore.
feed me now and evermore.

2. Open now the crystal fountain
whence the living waters flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield.
be thou still my strength and shield.

3. When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs and praises, songs and praises,
I will ever give to thee.
I will ever give to thee.

SONG: Guide me, O thou great Redeemer, by William Williams, from Together in Song,
Harper Collins Religious, Collins PUBLIC DOMAIN

WELCOME

Saide

Welcome to worship this morning. Our minister Ian is on leave. Today is Baptism of Jesus Sunday and we welcome Narelle Collas, one of our Presbytery Ministers, as our preacher. Later Narelle will invite us to reflect on how we look at baptism. It is so good to be standing as liturgist with you here in the church and with all who are joining us on the live stream. Along with Simone, Jenne, Kirsty, Geoff and the musicians I am delighted to be leading you in worship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge and respect
the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation,
the traditional custodians of this land
since time immemorial.

We are learning that the land
is not ours to own, but to look after;
and that if we listen,
we may hear in it the calling of the eternal Spirit.

**Responding to this call, we commit ourselves
to work for justice, reconciliation,
and care of the earth.**

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Saide

Come let us pray together for we are God's people ...

Majestic, powerful God we hear your voice
In thunder, lightning and pounding rain
In the roar of stunning waterfalls
In the trickling of water over stony creeks
In the stillness of silent ponds.

God of the prophets we hear your voice
Throughout history and today by the Jordan river
In the proclamation of repentance for forgiveness of sins
Through the offering of baptism by water and
In the prophecy of the One who will follow.

Holy Spirit, descending dove we hear your voice
Proclaim 'You are my Son, the Beloved'.
And we know that we too are beloved by you.
We are held in your heart and sent out by you
To love you, all people and all creation. Amen

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Saide

God of majesty, prophecy and love we offer our confessions to you.

Forgive us for the times we are deaf to your voice
Caught up in many concerns, unable to still ourselves enough to listen.
As we move into this new year help us to create space for stillness.

Forgive us for the times when we are distracted by many voices
Shouting, angry, bitter voices drowning out those who have no voice.
As we move into this new year help us to listen with our whole hearts.

Forgive us for the times when we fail to listen to our bodies
Pushing ourselves to do more, to work harder, to be available
As we move into this new year help us to remember that we are beloved. Amen

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Saide

And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' Mark 1:11

Listen to this voice, the voice from heaven and know
That in the name of Jesus, baptized and blessed by the river Jordan
Our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

GOSPEL: Mark 1:4-11, p 812

Kirsty

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word

Thanks be to God

CHILDREN'S TIME

Simone

A conversation about who and what can be beloved. What does it mean to be beloved.?

SONG: Christ, when for us you were baptized, Voices United 99

1. Christ, when for us you were baptized,
God's Spirit on you came,
as peaceful as a dove, and yet
as urgent as a flame.

2. God called you 'My beloved Son',
called you 'My servant true':
sent you God's kingdom to proclaim,
God's holy will to do.

3. Straightway and steadfast until death
you then obeyed the call,
freely as Son of Man to serve
and give your life for all.

4. Baptize us with your Spirit now,
your cross on us be signed,
that likewise in God's service we
may perfect freedom find.

SONG: Christ, when for us, by Francis Bland Tucker, Church Pension Fund,
from Voices United – the Hymn and Worship Book of the United Church of Canada, Hope Publishing Company,
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BOOK OF PSALMS: Psalm 29, **(Inclusive Language Bible)**

Jenne

Give glory to YHWH, you heavenly court,
give YHWH glory and strength!
Give forth the glory that God's Name deserves,
and worship YHWH in the splendour of holiness!
The voice of YHWH resounds over the waters'
the God of glory thunders over the raging seas.
God's voice is powerful, God's voice is full of majesty.
The voice of YHWH snaps the cedars,
shatters the cedars of Lebanon.
It makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
The voice of YHWH strikes with bolts of lightning;
the voice of YHWH shakes the wilderness,
the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of God twists the oaks,
and strips the forests bare;
and in God's Temple all cry, "Glory!"
YHWH sits in judgement over the flood;
YHWH is its Ruler forever.
Give strength to your people, YHWH!
Bless your people with peace!

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word

Thanks be to God

SERMON

Narelle

How often do you think about your baptism?

Perhaps your family reminded you of its importance by celebrating the anniversary of your baptism each year and so baptism has always been important to you. Or maybe you learned to appreciate it later, at confirmation or sometime as an adult.

I remember a service as a teenager when I was tuning out as the sermon started. My mother whispered in my ear "this was the minister that baptized you". I immediately changed as I understood somehow that Baptism was important and that I should listen to this man.

Most people I know don't think about baptism all that much. It was a ritual that was important to their parents.

If to marry someone of a particular faith they might need to produce a baptism certificate. As Minister I have had people who want their children 'done' if only to carry on the tradition. But day in and day out, I'm guessing very few of us give baptism all that much thought.

I'm asking you to think about all this, of course, because this Sunday, the first Sunday after the Epiphany, is the day on which we remember Jesus' own baptism. This gives us an opportunity to think more deeply, and claim more fully, the promises God made to us at our own baptism.

More importantly, I'm asking you to think about all this because I believe our Baptism and or conformation of our Baptism can have a lasting and powerful influence on our lives.

Let me explain.

Do you like affirmation?

Told that you are good at something, or if someone tells you what they appreciate about you – It makes you feel great doesn't it.

Facebook - 'liked' -

Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram invite us to collect thousands of "followers," "fans," or "friends," most of whom we've never met. Sports programs routinely reward kids just for showing up with medals "for participation."

And increasingly Ads are personalized, targeting our particular tastes, creating the impression that we are the most important customer in the world. And so on.

One of the reasons I think digital platforms, and social media in particular, are powerful is precisely because they creatively offer affirmation in plentiful doses.

Deep down, of course, we know that this kind of affirmation doesn't mean all that much. Or at least shouldn't. Many of the people we encounter online, after all, don't really know us and we don't know them, so how can their "likes" or "hearts" create any enduring sense of value or worth? And yet it's hard not to wonder what was wrong with the picture we posted to Instagram if only twenty people liked it when another picture garnered two hundred nods?

So while this affirmation may be somewhat superficial, it's at least better than nothing. We crave that recognition and interaction because we are, at heart, inherently social people.

Almost every element of our being reflects God's observation in Genesis that is not good for us to be alone, and so the affirmation, relentless as it is ubiquitous, social media creates the perception that we are linked to so many others – indeed, that we are surrounded by a community of like-minded, and like-able, people that value us.

I wonder if you as I have heard about studies that say that society is simultaneously more connected and yet lonelier than ever before. Why? Because while we may crave affirmation, what we need is acceptance.

Acceptance, I want to be clear, is not the same as “fitting in.” Indeed, it is its exact opposite. As teenagers we are keenly aware of that is needed to ‘fit in’. It is all about changing ourselves so as to be found acceptable to our peer group. Acceptance is rather about being acknowledged and valued just as we are. And there is nothing more important or necessary in leading a healthy, productive life than feeling accepted.

This is where Baptism comes in

There are two aspects from Mark's passage that speak to this.

1. The words from God are person and powerful – “You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased.” Wrapped in these words of acceptance are the blessings of identity, worth, and unwavering regard.

2. When does this baptism happen in Mark's gospel - what does it come before? - the temptation and beginning of ministry

Jesus' baptism isn't preamble to all that comes later in his life, it's the highpoint and climax of the story, it is the event within his life which empowers him to go out into his ministry – transforming the lives of those around him.

Again and again, as Jesus casts out unclean spirits, heals the sick, feeds the hungry, and welcomes the outcast, he does to others what has already been done to him, telling them via word and deed that they, too, are beloved children of God with whom God is well pleased. Baptism book ends Jesus' ministry = He started it by being baptized and concluded it by commanding the church to make disciples and baptize others.

Baptism is a call to discipleship.

In the darkest moment of the story when Jesus feels absolutely abandoned is followed immediately by the story of resurrection, where the messenger at the tomb testifies that God has kept God's baptismal promise and continues to accept and honour Jesus as God's own beloved Son.

So also, at our low moments, we might remember that the God who raised Jesus from the dead is the same one who promised in Baptism to never abandon us, to love and accept us always and as beloved children, even and especially when we have a hard time loving and accepting ourselves.

In Mark's narrative God's spirit descends on Jesus, infusing him with power and insight for the journey ahead.

Remembering our Baptisms, even if we were infants, provides a portal through which the spirit of God can energize and transform our lives. Baptism reminds us that if God is for us, who can be against us?

This is why I think baptism is so incredibly important, because it offers us the acceptance by the Creator of the Cosmos - not merely affirmation. This acceptance thereby empowers us to accept others in turn. Baptism reminds us that wherever we may go and whatever we may do or have done to us, God continues to love us, accept us, hold onto us and transform us.

And for a generation that has been sold through social media cheap affirmation as a substitute for genuine acceptance, there is no more powerful word.

There is a story told by a Rev Janet Wolf, who the Uniting Methodist minister at Hobson in Nashville, Tennessee. Hobson Church is a wildly diverse congregation that includes, as Janet has described it, “...people with power and PhDs and folks who have never gone past the third grade; folks with two houses and people living on the streets; and, as one person who struggles with mental health declared, ‘those of us who are crazy and those who think they're not.’”

A woman called Fayette found her way to Hobson church. Fayette lived with mental illness, lupus and without a home. She came to the church and was welcomed. She then joined the new member class. The conversation in the class turned to baptism— Janet explained that Baptism was “a holy moment when we are named by God's grace with such power it won't come undone,”

This especially grabbed Fayette's imagination. Janet tells of how, during the class, Fayette would ask again and again, “And when I'm baptized, I am...?” “The class learned to respond to her by concluding her sentence with, ‘Beloved, precious child of God’ ‘Oh, yes!’ she'd say, and then we could go back to our discussion.”

The day of Fayette's baptism came.

Fayette went under the water, came up spluttering, and cried, 'And now I am...?' And the whole congregation responded with 'Beloved, precious child of God, 'Oh, yes!' she shouted as she danced all around the sanctuary.

Two months later, Janet received a phone call.

Fayette had been beaten and raped and was at the hospital. So she went to her . Janet says "I could see her from a distance, pacing back and forth. When I got to the door, I heard, 'I am beloved....' She turned, saw me, and said, 'I am beloved, precious child of God, and....' Catching sight of herself in the mirror— hair sticking up, blood and tears streaking her face, dress torn, dirty, and rebuttoned askew, she started again, 'I am beloved, precious child of God, and...' She looked in the mirror again and declared, '...and God is still working on me. If you come back tomorrow, I'll be so beautiful I'll take your breath away!'

Beloved, the voice from heaven had proclaimed as the baptismal waters of the Jordan rolled off Jesus' body.

Beloved, the voice named him as he prepared to begin his public ministry.

Beloved, spoken with such power that it would permeate Jesus' entire life and teaching.

Beloved, he would name those he met who were desperate for healing, for inclusion, for hope.

Beloved, echoing through the ages, continuing to name those drenched in the waters of baptism.

Beloved. Child of God.

Fayette—beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold—This story challenges us to ask what it means that—like her, with her—we have been named by God's grace with such power that it won't come undone.

As I remember the Baptism of Jesus and my confirmation and affirmation of baptism, how will I reckon with the fact that I, that we, have shared in those waters—that in the sacrament of baptism and as members of the body of Christ, we, too, are named as beloved children of God?

How will we live in such a way that others will know themselves as named by God, beloved by God—especially those who have been given cause to think they are less than loved, less than children of the One who created them?

As you remember your Baptism – how does it affect how you live?

In the coming days, may the waters of our baptism so cling to us that in their depths we see who we are, and from our depths reflect to others their true name: beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold.

Acknowledgments:

Jan Richardson: *The Painted Prayerbook.com*

Bruce Eppley: *The Adventurous Lectionary*

David Lose: *In the Meantime*

Janet Wolf's story is from *The Upper Room Disciplines 1999* (Nashville: The Upper Room)

SONG: The New Road ATOK 344

Simone

You who puzzle on the Saviour's deeds,
Will you stop and listen where the New Road leads;
First born child of the refugees,
He was raised in Nazareth, schooled in charity,
And found salvation on His knees.

Manhood brought Him to the Jordan shore,
Where the Baptist shivered in the rags he wore;
Plunged his cousin in the pilgrim stream,
And the Dove descended and the Old Road ended
And the New Road wakened from a dream.

Show by living what the Lord had done,
In the selfless giving of his only son;
Chart this passage to the last Amen.
For the climb is steady if the pilgrim's ready,
The New Road reaches out again.

John Beavis, All Together OK

OFFERING, *musicians' choice*

Saide

We offer our gifts to God. Let us pray...

Beloved Son, we are your people.

Signed by your cross we bring our gifts to you

Offering our lives, our money, our time, our love

Bless all that we offer as we seek to obey your call

To be a people of love in a world much in need of love.

Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Geoff

In the song we have just sung, we sang these words:

And the Dove descended and the Old Road ended

And the New Road wakened from a dream.

I'd like to use that imagery of "ending and dreaming," to gather our prayers. It's imagery that can help us bring into our prayers the struggles, and anxieties our world has been full of this week: the ongoing COVID challenges here and elsewhere, the turmoil in the US, overnight tragedies here in suburban Melbourne and Indonesia.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we pray for those who find themselves at the end and unable to dream: refugees, those experiencing mental illness, those persecuted because of their race, politics, sexuality or religion.

May the life of Jesus help them dream even a little.

Loving God, we pray for the dreamers who have been pushed to the end of their families or nations and communities because their dreams are too inconvenient: the prophets for the environment, those who labour for reconciliation, those who support the weak.

May the life of Jesus keep them dreaming.

Inspiring God, we pray for those whose dreams are just beginning, those who have visions of life that are only just forming, who grab hold of sparks and turn them into lights of love for the unloved, hope for the fearful, and friendship for the lonely.

May our own following of Jesus help to foster their dreams.

God of hope we pray for those whose grieve the end of their dreams, those whose lives are drawing to an end, those who lives have been taken suddenly, those who grieve the loss of loved ones.

In some moments of silence, I invite you pray these prayers for nations, neighbourhoods, friends, relatives, colleagues known to you who are need new road and new dreams.

Quiet

Gracious God, grant us, this community to live out our baptism, to daily leave the old road and take the new road that Jesus has first walked. AMEN.

NOTICES

Saide

It's time now for notices. Please line up to my right, say your name and share your notice in a sentence or two. Please also take note of the weekly newsletter, the Olive Press and check out our website as well.

Including recorded #ChangeTheHeart video with Claire Foley: <https://youtu.be/m4bjQS6OvUM>

SONG: Down By the Jordan

Down by the Jordan, a prophet named John was baptizing,

Preaching a message the people found bold and surprising:

"God will forgive! Show that you'll change how you live!

Surely God's new day is rising!"

There by the river, the crowd came with great expectation:
"Are you God's Chosen One, sent here to rescue our nation?"
"No!" John replied. "He who is mightier than I
Judges and offers salvation."

Jesus, you went to be baptized along with the others,
Taking your place among sinners, God's lost sons and daughters.
Then with great love, God's Spirit came as a dove!
Your work began in those waters.

Here in the Church, we are baptized and filled with God's Spirit.
Freed and forgiven, we're welcomed with joy! Can you hear it?
This is God's sign! This is how God says, "You're mine!"
Let's take the good news and share it!

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BENEDICTION

Narelle

You are my beloved child with whom I am well pleased.
As we go out into this world we take the light of Christ with us to shine in the darkness
We take our sacred words to give us sustenance for the journey
so that we may go out and proclaim to those we meet
'You are a beloved child of God with whom God is well pleased
And that acceptance is for everyone
So the blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit
be with each one of us now and forever. Amen

SONG: May God bless and keep you AoV.1.177

May God bless and keep you,
May God's face shine on you;
May God be kind to you
and give you peace.

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WORSHIP TEAM

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And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:11