

For those with good memories you'll have already noted that this morning's reading is very similar to what Rob preached on a few weeks ago. His was from Mark 1 v.4 to 11 and mine today is v.9 to 15. Rob focussed on the significance of baptism – it being not just an important ceremony. Integral to it is our need to die to self, God's promise of forgiveness, a decision to want to go God's way both for ourselves and our children, a new start, and a desire to serve Him wherever he calls us. At Jesus' baptism, as Rob said, "it was a sign both of his commitment to his father, and also his father's commitment to him".

This morning I'd like to consider **commitment and parenthood** in more detail. In verses 10 and 11 we read how the drama unfolds, culminating in God proclaiming to Jesus as he came up out of River Jordan "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased". At such a seminal moment for the Jewish nation those words surprised me. God could have said or done infinitely more, inspiring his people and the wider crowd of onlookers with an eloquent, rousing monologue! And yet these few words are so, so powerful. And for someone with my upbringing, where at times I wasn't sure whether I was truly loved, I find God's words both challenging and reassuring! Surely for God it was easy to say such things about Jesus, as God is a perfect God, and his son is an integral part of the perfect trinity. That's as I would have expected but what about me / us and how our earthly parents affect how we relate to God?

For example verse 11 could have gone as follows :-

"You are my 30 year old son who apart from following in the family trade working as a carpenter haven't actually achieved anything significant in your life so far. Now get out there, put those Jewish leaders in their place, kick those Romans out, and give my down-trodden chosen people their freedom!" Maybe you have been at the receiving end of, or known someone with, the 'unloving, angry parent' perspective. Your worth seems to be measured in whether or not you perform to the tune of your critical parent.

Or maybe you'd have heard the words "You are my son, but you have an uncanny knack of disturbing me just when I'm in the middle of doing something far more important. I'm sure what you are doing is fine but please get on with it by yourself. If I have a moment I'll see if I can catch a glimpse". Such indifference or distractedness can be just as hurtful. The lack of genuine value and support leaves a lot to be desired.

A third scenario might have been that as Jesus came up for air nothing happened, just cold silence. 'Absent' parents may occur for all sorts of reasons – a death, marriage break-downs, being adopted, choices over our work - life balance, or because we are struggling with our own feelings of being unloved that we do not know how to reach out to others.

Such scenarios can be very painful experiences that can scar us for life if we do not receive healing. In knowing Jesus, I believe those chains can be broken and love can flood in. As Tom Wright explains “when the living God looks at us, at every baptised and believing Christian, he says to us what he said to Jesus on that day. He sees us, not as we are in ourselves, but as we are in Jesus Christ....God looks at us, and he says “You are my dear, dear child: I’m delighted with you”. **“You are my dear, dear child: I’m delighted with you”**”.

Wait a minute though, what about verses 12 and 13! God’s commitment to Jesus seemed very short-lived. In the next breath he’s sent his son out into the desert without food and water for 40 days to be tempted by Satan – that doesn’t sound very loving! But don’t forget that Jesus took his father’s words with him in his heart, he’d just been filled afresh with the Holy Spirit, God deliberately provides him with daily company in the form of nature and angels, and crucially, whilst challenging, he knew his son would be able to win through against the devil. That fatherly confidence, love, and support is clearly there. Similarly, he knows us intimately, loves us sacrificially, is committed to us eternally, and desires that each one of us grows in faith daily. We may not feel loved at all times, and we may not relish being tested but if we hold fast to the truth that God loves us and will equip us to face life’s challenges then we will grow in faith and love for Him, ourselves and others. Now that’s what I call good news – committed parental love for all by a personal living God! He is delighted with you.

Let us pray. Thank you God that we are your children and you love us beyond measure. Whatever our circumstances, be it in isolated lock-down, busy at work, home schooling our children, furloughed, or trying to stay connected on Zoom, help us Lord to know in our innermost being your unconditional love, to trust you, to open ourselves up to you, that we may desire to be refined spiritually into gold, pure gold. Help us to parent as you parent us, loving Father. Amen.

*Douglas Allenby*