

Sunday 7 June 2009 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

Baptism Talk

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Intro

Welcome to all – especially visitors. You may not have been expecting all that you're seeing or hearing in this church this morning, but I hope you find it a welcoming place to be and encourage you to 'work with it' this morning.

- Church has moved on a lot from its traditional image in the media
- I hope that what you'll get a sense that the community of Christians here today is vibrant and healthy, and concentrating not on being some kind of closed club or worse... cult
- Actually, we're a bunch of people whose lives have been radically transformed by the power and peace that comes from God – and we're doing our best to live that out together
- and as we do, that has the result of making us joyful, hopeful, and as we mirror Jesus' life and example, it spurs us to want to serve and love our communities and friends too.
- That's why this is a public ceremony today – because quite frankly what is happening with these 2 people, and what 2 billion Christians around the globe today share is too significant, too life changing, to good to NOT to shout about
 - And, if you'll excuse the pun, make a splash about.

Not going to keep you for long, but I'd like to give a little context to some of what we're going to see & hear this morning.

What comes through as you look at the people around you, and as we'll hear in a few minutes the story of each person is that something **profound and life-changing has happened to them in recent life**

- In simple terms – they are **encountering God** in the midst of real life
 - They are encountering our heavenly Father, encountering Jesus, and encountering the dynamic part of God, the Holy Spirit
 - They've come to realise that God is real, alive and very well
 - And that, if any of us allow it and welcome it, **encountering God means a change in life for the better** – Jesus called it 'life in all its fullness'. (John 10:10)
- Encountering God means a new found inner peace, new acceptance of who we are and what we're about, new direction, new protection,
 - and here's the biggest thing which I'll unpack in a couple of secs...
 - Colin & Sarai are getting to grips with the truth that walking with God through life **can free us from the chains that often bind our lives**
 - – from past hurts, past sins, from lives that feel broken,
 - from unhealthy mindsets and unhealthy actions in our lives today.
- All that we feel we can't do, can't make up for, can't be forgiven for, can't make amends for.....
 - Actually, all of that CAN be addressed and improved through relationship and doing life

- With the one who is God, the divine source of power and love in this universe, the one who sets life in motion in the first place –
- Jesus Christ can set you free – and these guys are testimony to that process beginning in them, and so am I, and so are many people here....

Baptism is a public way of saying to everybody else, and to the spiritual forces at work in this world – **‘I’m with God, I’m on his side now’**

- And that’s a big deal for these people to stand up and say in public!
 - So we’re going to stand with them, pray with them, lay hands on them in prayer and ask God to help them and bless them in that journey – and you’ll see all that happen when we go downstairs in a bit.
 - ERIC – with Colin – first Alpha course, recently come to faith & baptised himself

So what does this baptism event symbolise?

- Ceremony of baptism been going on for followers of Jesus for around 2000 yrs
 - survived across continents, languages, empires coming & going, wars, persecution, and though it **might seem odd in modern 21st century** Britain.... People still get baptised each week around this country.
- That’s because people haven’t really changed that much, and neither has God.
- It **symbolises** that fact that as **people come into contact with God**, regardless of race, income, age, education etc, as they come into **relationship**, and come into **changed lives**
 - It’s like moving from death to life. From darkness to light. From dirty to clean.

The apostle Paul, who wrote a lot of the letters in the New Testament part of the bible, summarises what I’ve just acted out well. Using pictorial language he says this in the book Romans:

- “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Rom 6:2-4)

In other words.....

As you **GO DOWN** into the water of baptism – symbolise that when we choose to follow Jesus in life we are really dying with Christ.

- Sharing in the power & reality of his death.
- Because the death of Christ did away with the effects, the power of sin & death. Through the cross

As you **COME UP** from the water – symbolise rising with Christ –

- taking on that new identity and truth that through Jesus we are set free,
- raised to new life, made clean in God’s sight.

OLD SELF (not *all black either!*)
BROKEN, DAMAGED
SIN, SADNESS
UNFORGIVENESS
DISAPPOINTMENT
FAILURES OF THE PAST

NEW SELF
FORGIVENESS
FREEDOM
PEACE, JOY – FROM GOD
POWER FOR NEW LIFE & DEEDS

The story of these 2 & many others here

Today we're celebrating adult or believer's baptism

- Some church traditions will baptise people as children, where the parents and God parents make promises on their behalf.
 - And then confirm those children when they develop their own faith in later years.
- The **heritage of The King's Centre** is that we like to **follow what Jesus taught** about **making that choice for oneself**, and believing in him – and so being **baptised in response to a personal belief**.
 - That's why I called it an adult or believer's baptism
- **What's important is that they are symbolising that they are different now**, from what they were like before they encountered and chose to follow Jesus in everyday life.
 - And that they are committed to that process of transformation and new life

The final thing I want to say before we let these guys speak for themselves is this.

- Whatever you make of today, or our particular style. In many ways, that's not the point, not the most important thing
- **What's important is this: church is for sinners. Baptism is for sinners.** King's Centre is not for those who think they've got it all sorted, but for those who realise they haven't
- Followers of Jesus are not perfect, and we're not expected to be. But the one we follow is perfect, and over time, Jesus will implant into our lives, characters, futures,
- something of His divine peace and power so that we might have what he called 'life in all its fullness'. Abundant life.

Baptism is celebration of what God has done for us – not what we're able to do for God

Today you might feel like you're not good enough for God to care about you. For God to bother with this life-giving relationship with you. That is simply not true.

- Nobody needs to feel the burden, the weight of guilt today.
- Nobody needs to carry the weight of a broken past or present without the hope of having that weight lifted.

God knows you, loves you, and as we face up to the truth that we are far from perfect, and often living and thinking in ways far from God's best intention.... (which is basically what the bible calls Sin)... then

- **Jesus says – that’s OK.** “You know that, and I know that.”
 - Just **choose to believe** that there is **more to life.**
 - That through me, Jesus, you can come into a dynamic new life where **your failings are forgiven and forgotten by God.**

No human effort can make a heart clean again in God’s sight

- But **the good news** is that when you become a follower of Jesus, choosing to put him first in life – **that’s exactly what does happen!**
- **Jesus made the way for you and I to be in dynamic, unbroken relationship with our creator.**
- **All you have to do is accept it as a free gift, and get going into life in all its fullness.**

That’s what the folk in KC this morning have **chosen to symbolise, through Baptism.** They’re going to **act out**, like billions of people before them, that **their old life** before knowing and following Jesus **has now passed away,**

- and has been **replaced by a new life in God** – which starts now, gets better and better, and then continues even after our physical bodies die.

And the offer is there for everyone.

So if any of what I’ve said has intrigued you and you’d like to find out more – have a chat with the person who invited you, or a KC regular. Respond during the worship time as we close the service

Time to let the stories of these folk speak for themselves.....

OFFER – IF YOU WANT TO GET BAPTISED – say so! We have towels!

- Publicly declare Jesus is Lord of your life