

## **Baptism of Jesus sermon by Andrew 12 Jan 2020**

**Isaiah 42: 1-9; Acts 10: 34-43; Matt 3: 13-end**

**Unlike most people I guess, I can actually remember my baptism. I hadn't been baptised as an infant because, my mother later confessed to me, she couldn't afford a new coat at the time (this was Corstorphine Old Parish Church and things like that mattered then). Anyway, I was baptised at the age of nineteen in the Catholic Chaplaincy in Newcastle where I was a student. My mother couldn't have been more horrified if I'd run off and joined the circus. I think she saw it as a kind of act of rebellion, which certainly isn't how I meant it. I was far too boring to be anyone's rebel.**

**Almost forty years on I think baptism almost is an act of rebellion, but nothing to do with shocking our mothers. It's an act of rebellion against Satan and all his works; the world, the flesh and the devil. It's an act of rebellion against war and injustice and bad, toxic religion that hurts people. This humble man who insists on a baptism of repentance for sins that are not his own calls time on the way things are and, if you like, he initiates a coming kingdom that nothing the world can do, not even its worst, can ever suppress.**

**So here we leave behind shepherds and kings, because here is where it all begins in earnest. The hidden life, the years of preparation are over. This carpenter's son has work to do – he has work to do for you, for me and for the world. He has work to do for the Pharisees who are blind to what he's about and work to do for prostitutes, tax collectors, Romans, Samaritans who can hardly believe that he means what he says. But believe they do because he lives it! This is Word made flesh and it's more than the religious people can take in and it's maybe more than we can take in.**

**Someone recently challenged me: You know that bit we say at the beginning of the service: there is no room for fear in love; we love because he loved us first. And I was asked: Do you really believe that? To which my answer, is: Yes, I do, but I'm still learning to live out of that belief, to live as if I inhabit this place where fear has no room in my life. It's work in progress, but, boy, such vital work.**

**I once received a New Year e-mail which included a picture of what looked like an airmail letter, addressed to "My fears", from "Me". It read: "I want you to know it's over between us. We've had a crazy ride this year, but I've found someone new. I'm getting back together with Faith. We have big plans for 2020. I can't let you hold me back any longer."**

**It reads like someone dumping a difficult abusive partner, which is exactly what it is. This Jesus, God's beloved, the man so gentle he won't break a bruised reed or snuff out a smouldering wick or raise his voice even, he wants me to break off that toxic relationship I have with a partner who was never meant for me: my fears, my self-doubt, my doubting that God could possibly love me in the way he promises, and that he can love me right into the places where I hurt the most, into my darkest places where sin gets a hold of me and I feel trapped sometimes just by the fact of being me.**

In the Catholic journal, the Tablet, a theologian explored something of what it means to let a sense of being loved on God's terms and in God's way permeate into the deepest levels of ourselves, to hear that voice of God telling us: You're my Beloved. The occasion for his reflections was the very ordinary experience of having to rebuke his three year old son, Ted. Ted had been naughty and was now sitting, very unhappily, on the designated "Time-out" chair to cool off.

"Ted, my son, looked so pitiful as he protested his innocence and my cruelty while sitting on what I'd just designated as the "Time Out" chair. Was I doing the right thing at all? How I'd love not to be meting out consequences to my precious three-year-old son. But I clung to the logic of the simple facts: Ted had been doing something wrong; I gave him ample warning to cease; he continued to do it; his disobedience had to have a penalty. Such reasoning was of limited solace to my feelings. He now named me the meanest daddy in the world. Would he ever love me again? Then, suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, I had this overwhelming and symbiotic sense of both loving Ted and of being loved by God.

I felt intensely the deepest love for my son, at a depth I'd never reached before. I was consumed with empathy and solidarity with him for having to suffer the consequences of his wrong actions. I wished it did not have to be this way but also knew that my discipline was my love at work, even as I longed for the "minute" to be over and to take him in my arms. Then, as I experienced my loving Ted, I had a sensation of being myself loved by God, and I had a bodily felt sense of God's love for both of us, and indeed for all people. At almost sixty (I had a late start in parenting), after many years as a theologian, I knew, in the marrow bone of my being, that God *is* – and is in love with us all".

This is a kind of loving parents know well, a shaft of love, mixed with pain, mixed with joy, which is an echo of how God loves you. It is love beyond our imagination. But those words: "This is my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" are for you. Clothed in Jesus through our baptism in him, everything that is true for him is true for us. It's that big inheritance; but it is a lifetime's work to claim it, live it, to allow its joy to pulse through your veins as if you or I have just emerged, splashing out of the Jordan river, shaken the water out of our hair and heard those words spoken for you as if you were the only one. So send your fears that letter today (dump that toxic partner in your life) and this year may you know your belovedness to the greatest depth you've ever experienced. Amen.