

Dorset South & West Circuit written service, Jan 10th 2021, by Rev David Reep

based on the Lectionary readings
Gen.1.1-5 Ps 29 Acts 19.1-7 Mark 1. 4-11

Call to Worship

The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness and the power of God was moving over the water. (Gen1.2)

The Lord rules over the deep waters; He rules as king for ever.

The Lord gives strength to his people and blesses them with peace. (Ps 29. 10-11)

Hymn 106

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| 1. God, whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard
and took their flight,
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray,
Let there be light! | 3. Spirit of truth and love
life-giving holy Dove
speed forth your flight;
move on the waters' face,
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
Let there be light! |
| 2. Christ, you have come to bring
on your redeeming wing
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
O to all humankind
Let there be light! | 4. Blessed and holy Three,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world far and wide
Let there be light |

John Marriott (1780–1825)

Prayerful Meditation inspired by the Old Testament readings

In the beginning was darkness and you, God, created light
which enabled so many wonders of nature to evolve.

Day and night are necessary for life to exist:

“Silent growth while we are sleeping”

There is a night economy too, Lord, in your creation.

Nocturnal creatures enjoy their moment out of the sun.

The Psalmist sees your power and hears your voice in the ocean

The seas reflect different moods – calm, majestic and buoyant

but at other times terrifying and threatening

And this verse from a nineteenth century hymn sums up what many of us may be feeling:

Shadows deep have crossed our pathway

We have trembled in the storm;

Clouds have gathered round so darkly

That we could not see thy form.

Yet thy love has never left us

In our griefs alone to be,

And the help each gave the other,

Was the strength that came from thee.

Lord's Prayer

Lesson: Mark 1. 4-11

So John appeared in the desert, baptizing and preaching. "Turn away from your sins and be baptized," he told the people, "and God will forgive your sins." Many people from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them, in the Jordan River.

John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. He announced to the people, "The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. I baptize you with water but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit".

Not long after Jesus came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven. "You are my own dear Son; I am pleased with you"

Acts 19.1-7

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul travelled through the interior of the province and arrived in Ephesus. There he found some disciples, and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?"

"We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit", they answered. "Well then, what sort of baptism did you receive?" Paul asked. "The baptism of John" they answered.

Paul said, "The baptism of John was for those who turned from their sins, and he told the people of Israel to believe in the one who was coming after him – that is, in Jesus".

When they heard this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul placed his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came down upon them, they spoke in strange tongues and also proclaimed God's message. They were about twelve men in all.

Sermon: **"Out of the ordinary"**

This Sunday, according to the wording of our modern Lectionary, is the first Sunday in Ordinary time. I suppose it distinguishes it from all the special events and seasons of the Christian Year – Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension-tide and Pentecost. I wondered what the opposite of Ordinary would be. Extraordinary? Well maybe, or can it mean just 'even more ordinary'? But the ordinary is not to be despised – many good things come out of it..

Our Gospel reading tells the story of the baptism of Jesus. The first thing that struck me was that in one sense this was not a 'one-off' event. His cousin John was gaining a reputation - out in the desert sporting strange clothes (unusual enough to be mentioned by the Gospel writers) and also eating an equally strange diet. He spoke out strongly urging people to repent and prepare for the One who was to come. As a token of their commitment they were baptised in the river. Many responded and became what the Bible calls his disciples. There must have been a very considerable number of them (one translation mentions 'crowds') because John acquired the nick-name 'John the Baptist' and I guess that wouldn't have happened if there had only been a handful of people responding. Jesus applauded his work (calling him the last and greatest of the prophets (Matt 11.9) and indeed was willing to go out to the desert himself to receive John's baptism too.

However in another sense the baptism of Jesus was very much a 'one-off' event. The Spirit descended 'like a dove' maybe 'gently like a dove'. (The Spirit manifests itself in so many

different ways – remember the ‘rushing wind’ and ‘flames of fire’ at Pentecost?). And then there was the voice “This is my beloved Son” - God especially authenticating the mission of Jesus. In his last words on earth prior to the Ascension Jesus charged his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We do not have any record of Jesus having baptized any-one. I wonder whether this farewell command is partly to ensure that we remember his continuing living presence (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) among us.

Like all institutions with their necessary guidelines and rules, the early Church soon experienced different interpretations and baptismal practice. Some of the divisions Paul dealt with in the church at Corinth were apparently related to baptism. He says he has heard about their quarrels 1 Cor.1.12 *“Let me put it this way: each one of you says something different. One says “I follow Paul”, another, “I follow Apollos”, another “I follow Peter”; and another “I follow Christ”. Christ has been divided into groups! Was it Paul who died on the cross for you? Were you baptized as Paul’s disciples? I thank God I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius. No-one can say, then, that you were baptized as my disciples....”*

In our Acts reading Paul arrives at Ephesus and finds people who had been baptized by John, but they did not know about the Holy Spirit. Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus., “and the Holy Spirit came upon them, they spoke in strange tongues and also proclaimed God’s message”. Paul stayed three months speaking in the synagogue and, holding discussions and teaching them about the kingdom of God, and he remained in the wider area for two years so that “all the people both Jews and Gentiles, heard the word of the Lord”

He wrote and spoke about the gifts of the Spirit and claimed that he had experienced the gift of tongues too but urged restraint in public worship. *“When you give thanks to God in spirit only, how can an ordinary person taking part in the meeting say “Amen” to your prayer of thanksgiving? He has no way of knowing what you are saying.....I thank God that I speak in strange tongues more than any of you. But in church worship I would rather speak five words that can be understood, in order to teach others, than speak thousands of words in strange tongues”*

Do you remember back in the 1990’s such names as John Wimber (and his “*Signs and Wonders*”), Willow Creek, the Toronto Blessing and the explosion of charismatic worship? Many churches founded then still flourish, and there was the temptation to think that this was the way for the whole Church to go. But there is no ‘one- size- fits- all’ form of worship. I remember a young Baptist minister at the time addressing a group of Methodist ministers about the charismatic movement and saying “I haven’t hit the jackpot yet!” Baptism like all religious rites is a sign and the outward sign is not the important thing but the truth it symbolises. The water of baptism does not leave any physical mark but I like to think of it as an invisible spiritual tattoo. Remember to whom we belong.

The story is told of a royal visit to a Staffordshire pottery. The king was shown the slow moving conveyor- belt carrying the newly moulded plates to be fired in the kiln. He gently lifted a plate to examine it, then carefully put it down in its place.. When the royal visit was over the managing director hurried back to the kiln area. Where is the plate the king touched? We will not sell that, but put it on display in our museum. It was just a common plate but it now carries the hand-print of the king and is ordinary no longer. Jesus of Nazareth, the King of Kings, touches our lives and the ordinary becomes special.

Greet each day. An ordinary day? But more often than you think. it can turn out to be extraordinary. Revel in it and thank the One who gives us all our days and promises “Lo I am with you always to the end of the world”

Prayers of Intercession

O God our Father, Help us in our prayers for others. Make us mindful of their needs and show us what we can do to match our words with meaningful actions.

We pray for all who suffer from the corona virus epidemic, for those who are ill at home and in hospital and all who care for them.

For those who are suffering hardship through loss of income and livelihood

For those finding it difficult to cope.

We pray for all in positions of leadership who are having to make impossibly difficult decisions. We remember too that in this pandemic many poorer countries have far fewer resources with which to tackle the outbreak. We pray that there will be a generous sharing of facilities internationally.

We pray for your world-wide church and our part in it. Teach us how to reflect the Light of Christ in this new year.. And these prayers we bring in the name of Jesus who comes alongside us and offers us peace. Amen.

Hymn 233

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| 1. When Jesus came to Jordan
to be baptised by John,
he did not come for pardon,
but as his Father's son.
He came to share repentance
with all who mourn their sins,
to speak the vital sentence
with which good news begins. | 2. He came to share temptation,
our utmost woe and loss,
for us and our salvation
to die upon the cross.
So when the Dove descended
on him, the Son of Man,
the hidden years had ended,
the age of grace began. |
| 3. Come, Holy Spirit, aid us
to keep the vows we make;
this very day invade us,
and every bondage break.
Come, give our lives direction,
the gift we covet most:
to share the resurrection
that leads to Pentecost. | |

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

Blessing