**BAPTISM SERVICE – KNOWING WHO YOU ARE 8th Dec 2024**

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. (Mat 3:1-15)*

PRAY

I love the character of John the Baptist. **DP – JOHN THE BAPTIST**

 It’s not so much his miraculous birth - such a wonderful surprise to his parents…

 And certainly not because of his untimely, tragic and pointless death…

 on the whim of the vicious ruler of the day, simply to satisfy his ego.

It’s more because of the image He conjures in my mind… PICTURE

John has been living in the desert for over 10 years with a bunch of passionate hermits,

 The mainstay of his diet is locusts and wild honey…

Imagine it with me if you will…

 Finding to your delight a beehive in a tree, you reach in, carefully, gingerly, fearfully

 Bees going wild…

 But you have learnt, just move slowly, don’t react, don’t make them angry…

Eventually, your fingers dig deep into the rich honeycomb,

 your mouth begins watering,

 and you eagerly eat of your delicious find – crunch, slurp, crunch.

 You have a meal at last!

But then it’s time for some protein.

 You notice them jumping around, and you begin to get excited –dinner time!

 Moving toward a bunch of them, you slowly creep toward your prey.

 Knowing full well, that as soon as one moves - they are all gone.

Eventually, close enough, with net stretched wide – you lunge,

 throwing yourself and the net just over the top of the place where they were.

 Some get away, but to your delight – you have caught about 10. Delicious.

You sit, anticipating this delicacy, and slowly, one by one, you eat.

 First removing the wings, you then bite off the heads, next to the legs…

 the crunch brings a certain delight

 And finally the torso, the nutritious, juicy bit. Yum!

I don’t know if this is how it actually was,

 but the scriptures do take the time to tell us that this was his diet!

But mostly they tell us of his work

 Afterall – this was his destiny.

 John the Baptist has known this as his purpose from the moment He was born.

To bring many back to the Lord, in the Spirit and power of Elijah

 he will make ready a people for the coming of God’s promised Messiah. (Luke 1:14-17)

And so, emerging from his self imposed hibernation in the wilderness,

 John leaves his community, wanders into Jerusalem and begins to fulfil his destiny.

I picture him, dressed in a barely tanned camels hide, reeking of partly rotting flesh,

 hairy with a wild beard, mattered with honey, trapped bees and grasshopper legs!

This fearsome man, bursts onto the public stage and proclaims at the top of his voice:

 “Repent”!

 And wouldn’t you if you heard him, saw Him!

 “The Kingdom of God’ is at hand! Get ready for His coming!

 ”Turn back to God, get your lives straight”

And guess what - people respond!

 They flock to him, listen to what he says, change their ways and get baptised to show it.

 Just like the folk who have shared today are doing.

 Demonstrating their desire to live the way God wants. PAUSE

St. John is relatively polite in his account, but Luke pulls no punches…

 recording with all its brutal force the Baptisers confronting rhetoric!

 *"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

 *Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. (Luk 3:7-8)*

How would you respond if such a character burst into our homes or church? PAUSE

I often wonder what this says about me - That I like a character like JtB?!

 Perhaps it’s the sort of preacher I secretly want to be like!

 Completely unconcerned about what others think of me

 Boldly calling people to repent – with no thought about how they might react.

And this is certainly one thing we can say about John…

 He didn’t care what others thought of him.

 He was willing to be different, to stand out, or to be insignificant…

 at least in the worlds eyes,

To be odd or overlooked, disregarded…

 He was his own person – or more accurately – God’s own person,

And this was true because he was confident in who he was,

 Certain about God’s call on His life…

 Sent from God, As a witness to God

John understood his purpose and mission.

 And was comfortable in his own skin… (or that of a camel at least!)

 In who he was!

What about you? **DP CONFIDENT**

 Do you know who you are, like who you are?

 Are you comfortable and confident in who God has made you to be?

Like John the Baptist. God has made you – you.

 And he loves you, likes you,

 AND Like John the Baptist He has a special purpose that only you can fulfil.

John the Baptist didn’t care what others thought about him.

 But for this to be true takes something special

 It requires a confidence, a deep knowing that you are valuable.

 That your worth is NOT determined by what others think…,

 or what clothes you wear or friends you have…

 It is NOT determined by what grades you get or job you do, or house you live in

 It is NOT determined by what your hair is like, or the shape of your body…

 That it doesn’t matter what others think or say about you, or how they treat you…

The ONLY thing that matters – is what God thinks.

 Is knowing what God thinks of you! That He delights in you.

So how do we get this confidence?

 This self belief?!

 How do we become completely comfortable in who we are?

I want to suggest today, that,,, **Confidence comes from knowing what God thinks of you!**

And if any of you have tracked with those getting baptised.

 You would have seen their growing confidence

 Their sharing was testimony of this

 Their growing confidence because have discovered what God thinks of them.

Those around us, media, culture, perhaps even our own family want to tell us who we are!

 It is easy to believe what they say.

 If you are not rich, popular, or the right ethnic background

 If you don’t wear the right clothes, or use the right products or play the right sport…

 you don’t fit in, you are not wanted, not worthy, not even loveable!

And most of us tend to believe these lies!

 We think that our worth is based on what others think.

John the Baptist knew this wasn’t true.

 He knew it was because of what God thinks.

 John the Baptist was a Nazarite!

 Someone set apart by God and for God –

 From the moment of his birth He knew this was who he was!

And this made all the difference.

 Knowing what God thinks will make all the difference for you.

Andew had been adopted. And felt like he didn’t fit. Anywhere!

As a Young Adult discovering his birth family become his only objective

 Every conversation, every interaction and all his energy was poured into it.

 For Him – discovering this – would help him know who he was.

 Understanding why she hadn’t kept him…

 This was the only thing that mattered.

I met with him just after he had met his birth mother for the first time…

 He was quiet and withdrawn, pensive…

I asked what was going on and how it went.

 “Fine” was the answer I received. But obviously it wasn’t

In digging deeper it became apparent that now that he had met his mother…

 nothing else had really changed.

 She had her life, he had his. He was still the same.

His questions hadn’t been answered and he still didn’t really know who he was!

This profound disappointment caused him to search dipper within

 To keep looking

And this lead him to Jesus.

 Through Christian friends, becoming a part of a Church, reading the Bible for Himself

 Andrew came to meet Jesus, to experience the transforming love of God…

 He discovered he had a family – the church

Then, by God’s Spirit met Jesus for himself

 And he came to know God’s deep and lavish love for Him.

When this happened – everything changed.

 He begun to understand who he really was

 A child of God. Loved by Jesus and part of His family.

This is what those getting baptised today have discovered

 It is what you can come to know for yourself by meeting Jesus.

 Because confidence comes from knowing that you belong to Jesus PAUSE

John the Baptist knew Jesus

 His whole life was about Jesus…

 To help people get ready for Jesus!

Having this clarity, this certainty about his purpose gave him great confidence.

But what about us? DP - THINKING

 What about you?

 Do you know who you are.

 Do you know what God thinks of you?

Damien (not his real name) was a good church kid.

 His parents were upstanding members of the local Baptist church and very likeable people

And Damien, the oldest of 3 boys was fun, energetic and actively involved in the life of the Church – he had to be, it was just the way it was for his family.

However Damien needed others to like him.

 How he dressed, who he hang out with, what others thought of him was everything!

 Because deep down, underneath the bravado, Damien lacked confidence!

 He had no real idea that God even liked Him!

As a result his attitude and behaviour… his manner was nothing like Jesus!

 He was arrogant, demanding and indifferent to those who struggled.

I remember how dismissive, even rude and abusive he had often been when we saw someone who was different or doing life tough!

How horrible it was when driving the youth home we would pass someone…

 just a little bit different, and he and the other YP would wind down the window…

 and make some unkind remark or comment for their own amusement!

And like his parents - image, comfort and to be seen to do the right thing…

 was what mattered most.

 Impressing the right people is what made him feel ok!

However that all changed when Damien met Jesus for himself – and was changed!

 It happened like this….

I took a number of the older youth to spend a week serving the homeless of Adelaide,

 Handing out meals, chatting with them in the courtyard

 and helping renovate one of the homeless shelters.

On the first day of this task, as we sat on the kitchen floor scraping lino,

 we were joined by one of the residents.

 He came in, tattooed, ear rings in his nose, ears

 and most likely many other parts of his body, fortunately unseen!

 And sporting an impressive, red Mohawk

.

Now remember this was in the early 90’s

 Damien had never seen anyone like this,

 and certainly never spent any time with such a person. I mean why would he!

Anyway, this guy walks in, walks up to Damien, sticks out his hand to shake and announces: “Hi, my names Ray, and I’m gay!”

It was one of those moments

 I had no idea what was going to happen next

 Ray was the sort of person Damien loved to ridicule, pick on, belittle, dismiss.

 And whenever he could - ignore!

It made him feel stronger, superior, self-satisfied!

 But to respond poorly that would look bad… so what could he do?!

 His only option was to put on a brave face and make the best of it.

But as a result Damien was profoundly changed.

 Over the hours that followed, as Damien and Ray scraped the floor together,

 they chatted,

 They told stories,

 shared about their past experiences,

 laughed and cried together.

During the time Damien would tell Ray of what he had heard in church about Jesus,

 And Ray would tell Damien of what it meant to be broken, discarded, rejected!

As a result not only did Ray hear about Jesus,

 but through Ray, Damien himself encountered Jesus.

 The stories he knew and told - became real.

 As Ray honestly shared of his own brokenness and pain…

 Damien came to understand that God loves both Ray – and Himself deeply.

 He doesn’t need to impress Him, or prove anything to Him

 God loves each and everyone of us completely.

As a result Damien came to know Jesus in a personal way. Was changed by Him.

Damien told me later, that of all that I did during his teenage years in youth ministry,

 that few day’s with Ray on the kitchen floor was the most powerful.

 It was what changed him the most!

 Because in talking with Ray, He came to see things as they really were,

 To see his own insecurity and need

 To face his arrogance, pride and self-righteousness

But most importantly he came to discover for himself God’s incredible love

 He encountered Jesus personally.

 came to know Jesus,

 experienced God’s delight in Him as His son…

 And this changed everything!

Damien is now serving God as a pastor in the US

 He has passion for God and a heart for the broken that is transforming his community

And all of this is because he knows he doesn’t need to impress anybody.

 What others think of him – no longer matters!

Because deep down, in the very core of his being, He knows God loves him.

 He knows God delights in him.

 He knows he is part of God’s family.

And this is the only thing that matters!

It can change everything for you too. **DP - GOD LOVES YOU**

John the Baptist knew who he was – because He knew Jesus,

 He knew what God thinks of him – loved, chosen, sent.

 And as a result didn’t care what others thought…

but had the confidence to live the way God wants.

You can have this same confidence to.

 The confidence we see growing in these folk being baptised today.

 It begins by getting to know Jesus, encountering Him personally.

And when you do, you discover how much God loves you, delights in you…

 In fact you discover that he even likes you.

 And when you realise this – you discover it is the only thing that matters.

PRAYER

SONG

**QUESTION** AT END OF SERVICE:

Do you ………. confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?

Do you turn from your sins, believing that through faith in Jesus you are forgiven?

Will you follow Christ and serve him in the fellowship of His Church?

# Then Come and Be baptised…

IN WATER:

On your repentance and public confession of faith, I now baptise you in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.