

Acts 2:37-42

Today we're beginning the third of our mini-series of this summer – the first one was on Psalms, the next one on Ephesians, today we're starting a two-week series on baptism. We're thinking of how it includes us in the love of God, in his mission and in his Church. Baptism doesn't necessarily exclude those not baptised but it acts as encouragement and reminder to us who are baptised to keep on including others in God's great love for the world. It's a reminder and a sign of God's great love for everyone.

Baptism brings with it a security of putting our trust in God. It gives us a certain stillness of being in the midst of chaos. It doesn't mean that we're not anxious or worried – we wouldn't be human if we weren't – but it provides a rock on which to lean in times of trouble. Deep down we know that God knows what he's doing and that he will look after us. That's that anchor that keeps us grounded.

The world doesn't know that stillness of surety in God. The world in which we live provides constant entertainment and distraction with iphones, internet and the media. It scares us and makes us anxious with the steady flow of news of war, tension and violence throughout the globe. Life is becoming faster and faster allowing less and less time to think and digest what we're hearing. We're in a race that has no end. It's as if we were watching a tennis match. Our eyes follow the tennis ball which starts going quicker and quicker and quicker until finally we cannot see the ball anymore and our heads are spinning. No wonder we cannot see or hear God.

So today with the Psalmist I'd like to invite us to sit still for a few moments before we move on. 'He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.'"

Silence

After Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost three thousand people were baptised. How did they live out their baptism? By devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. The author of the 'Toward a Sane Faith' devotional blog comments: 'At first glance, these activities appear to be a little mundane. Yet, for millennium, these spiritual disciplines have deepened the faith of Jesus' followers, opened them to a greater experience of God's love and grace, and equipped them to serve and to share the good news of the new life with others.'<sup>1</sup>

That's why we gather together. Because to live out our baptism, we need a community of believers. Baptism itself is a gift of community, of belonging in God's Church. It's inclusive and welcoming, saying: you are not alone. You need not be alone ever again. What follows are a few insights that Mary Thompson from Papay shared with me this last weekend. Another proof that we need one another to thrive and grow in faith.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.integrity-authenticity-love.com/repent-and-be-baptized/>.

Faith comes to everyone differently. Most of us have been baptized as children and our faith followed later. Some have been baptized in adulthood as a result of faith that had grown in them. For some it's been one big dive into the waters and they've been happily swimming ever since. Some take their precious time and inch slowly into the water, unsure of themselves and the vastness in front of them. Some stand at the shore and watch for a long time before taking any decision of whether to enter or not. Some fear that water – that it will submerge them and drown them. What they don't realize is that it gets easier the farther you get as the water supports you as you float. Our weight, size or shape do not matter as we rely on water to support us.

A lot of parallels with the life of faith. It's God's love supporting us throughout our lives. We do not need to do anything other than to enter into the waters of God's love. The rest follows. Again stillness and trust help – Peter tried to walk on water, panicked and started sinking. If we simply float and let the water carry us, we can spend a long time in peace and enjoyment.

How about later in the life of faith? Some try Christianity and reject it, some lose faith. The images followed: Some go in too deep too quick and get a cramp. They get out of their depth. They then come out and are scared to get back in. Some keep swimming under their own strength instead of floating, they do too much and burn out. Some, after dipping their toes in, get distracted sunbathing on the beach. Next they look the tide has gone out and they are left behind. Some again get caught in a tsunami and are deposited far away inland. They need help to find their way back.

Another image Mary came up with is that of the shower of blessings. When we stand in the shower cubicle, we let water fall upon us. Again we do not need to do anything, God's love does it and showers us. This all reminds us that baptism is a gift of God – we do not need to do anything for God to love us, he just does. In the baptismal service we say that Jesus came into the world: for the person about to be baptised he lived and showed God's love; for them he died; for them he rose again. All this he did for us before we knew anything of it. And so the word of Scripture is fulfilled: 'We love because God loved us first.'

I'd like to leave you with another of Mary's God-given insights. She says that it's by osmosis that water moves from a wet to a dry area. That's how our love, another gift of God shining through us, should spread to others – slowly and gently. She says: Don't go throwing buckets of water at people if they're not on fire! Amen.