

Coming up out of the waters, eyes clearing and squinting into the sunshine, that sudden pop of sound as the ears cleared out, Jesus found his footing and leaned into the flow of the river, he heard something. In that moment of emerging, a new life opened to Jesus. Deep within him he heard God's voice. "You are my Son, my Beloved. With you I am well pleased."

In the early Church Baptism was the way you began as a member. But before that there was a period of preparation and training. Being Christian was a risky business. It could get you arrested, tortured, killed and your family left destitute. Being Christian was subversive and feared by the authorities.

Baptism had been part of the spiritual life of the People of God from Old Testament times. It was a ritual to mark a passage in life. It was a way of saying, "I am leaving my old self behind. I am letting it die. And I will rise up new, washed, reborn and begin my new life with God."

This was what John the Baptist was doing. He was ritually helping people make themselves ready to be with the Messiah when he came. His was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. He was getting people into a state of spiritual readiness for the coming Holy One. This One would baptize not just with washing water, but with a purifier's fire, burning away all that was left of the old self, revealing the image of God, in which we all are made, pure and untainted.

The Early Church taught that becoming a Christian was a total about-turn in life. In fact the word "repentance" comes from the Greek word *metanoia* which means "to head in a new direction", or "re-orient your life". The teaching of the New Testament is that Baptism is an act in which you die to your old self, and rise newly made in Christ, and become reborn as one of the children of God. Now as a "Christian" you become a bearer of the Christ. You are living, no longer in the world, with its values and standards, but in Christ, living as if you were already before God, day and night, in heaven. You arise from the water with a ministry. You will carry on the work of Christ which was begun in Jesus, and is now being done by people like you, who make up his body, the collection of the reborn, the Church. Paul says that in Baptism we live lives which are hidden in Christ with God. So it is God who lives in us, being revealed to those around us.

It is no wonder, given all the heavy theology I just went through, that Baptism was reserved for adults only. And the Baptist Churches today still require you to seriously know what you are taking on before you get baptized. This makes marriage look fairly easy by comparison!

So what changed? Quite soon in the story of the church we hear of heads of households becoming Christian and being baptized, along with their whole crew. So family, employees, slaves, everyone suddenly became Christian without really being asked. By the Mediaeval period when in "Christendom" everyone was Christian, only the unbaptised were not. It was really important to be baptized since the Church taught that there was no hope of salvation if you were not part of the Church. Cemeteries had sad little enclosures for babies who died in childbirth, unbaptised, just outside the consecrated ground of the church. Clergy, a generation older than me were taught, "If it stays still, bless it. If it moves baptize it."

I did my first baptism in deep water about 15 years ago. I was in a country parish and one of our life-long members was going to get married. Her fiancé was not a Christian, but in coming to church with her he was beginning to get the whole Christian thing. He decided he needed to get baptized. It was part of the new life he intended to lead as a married man and a member of his

wife's church. But Rob was 6'4" and about 300lbs. He did not fit into the font. We moved the whole service down to the river one Sunday and together, at the time when I usually hoist the wee child above the font, he and I walked into the water until we were about chest deep. With me holding him, I said the words of baptism and he let himself fall backwards under the water. There he stayed a few moments, then, with me pulling him up, he emerged. Coming up out of the waters, eyes clearing and squinting into the sunshine, that sudden pop of sound as the ears cleared out, Rob found his footing and leaned into the flow of the river, he heard something. "You are God's beloved child," I said to him, "He is well pleased with you!". I signed him with the sign of the cross and led him back to the dry land and the rest of his life, a new man.

Because of what the entire congregation saw that day, the next Summer we returned to the water and a whole group renewed their baptismal vows and experienced the dramatic act of the baptism. We studied baptism and faith for months. Their old lives were drowned in the deep waters of death and they arose, resurrected, to the new life of Christ.

For traditional Anglicans this is uncomfortable stuff. We have been told to do it the old way. But there is something about the original meaning of Baptism which we have lost. We have missed that chance to experience the power of this great sacrament, which is a bit lost, I think, on a small child. We have also lost that teaching that life in Christ is a decision and a new way of living. It is a leaving behind of the way everyone else lives, and the beginning of consciously living, carrying the light of Christ within our hearts, our decisions and our daily way of living. Baptism isn't like the mumps, rubella and measles vaccination that we give our babies. It is actually the decision to be a follower of the Way of Christ. The body of the Church is all those who have decided to do that.

The mediaeval Church, on which the Anglican Church is still modeled, was said to be like a great Arc, a Noah's Arc #2. I guess there, the people who decided to actually be followers of Christ were like the crew, and everyone else was pretty much like passengers. As the Anglican church moves forward we will need to look at a Baptism of our Church. We need to change. We know we are dying out in Canada. It is coming to the time when we need to re-orient our lives as a church and say, we want to live as followers of the way of Jesus in this new world, and let die the ways which were of the old Church of England from long ago and far away.

In baptism it is not goats going in and sheep coming out. The same Jesus went into the water as came out. The Grace Church on Kennedy will be the same people as are here now. We will still be Anglicans to the bone! But if we see that move across the deep waters of Lawrence and Eglinton as our baptismal journey, then we need to arrive there with hearts and minds renewed, and our life as the Body of Christ modeled on being more Jesus-like than church-like.

The Enemy will do everything, meanwhile to prevent our new ministry, to divert us into the temptations of anxiety about money, about hopes of fame and glory, about power and influence, just as Jesus experienced straight after his baptism. But if we, like him, anchor ourselves in prayer and trust, we will not be left alone, but will be supported by angels and empowered by God.

In the year ahead I want to offer a course on the teachings of Jesus and the practice of faith as lived in the early Church. I want to invite you to come and learn again the heart of the teachings of our church, the core values of the Christian Way of Life, and the difference that makes to the way you live. Jesus says that if you follow him you will find the way to live in the deep peace and joy with God. When he was baptized and then emerged from the wilderness, that was the life in which he lived, died and rose again. It can be yours.