

## Saturday in Trinity Week 16, Year C

Mark 1.1-11

Imagine you are sound asleep and dreaming of everyday things,  
when suddenly the door bursts open and a bright light is shone on your face.  
A voice, breaking in on the dream-world you've happily inhabited, shouts,  
'Wake up! Get up! You'll miss out!'  
And without delay, as you're struggling to come to terms with reality,  
the speaker tips cold water on your face to make the point:  
time to stop dreaming and face the most important day of your life.

That's the opening of Mark's gospel.

John the Baptist bursts in out of nowhere, preparing the way for Jesus.  
He's shaking people awake declaring that it was it was time to stop dreaming  
and wake up to God's reality: the way that God sees the world.

Baptism comes with the same force.

It has nothing to do with being 'nice' or 'polite' or 'good'.

It will change you.

It's a new reality.

It's a new way of life.

It's a new way of holiness.

It's - when combined with faith – the guarantee of our salvation.

Baptism is not a signpost;

it is *the* gateway to a life beyond imagining.

And that life is God's life

and it so full of exciting and welcoming features

that we *ought* to find it overwhelming and bewildering,

unaware of the totality of what's occurring when Willow is baptised.

At that moment the old world will be left behind

and she enters the new one, part of God's future.

In the simple but powerful action of plunging someone into the water  
in the name of the Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit –  
there is a real dying to the old creation and a real rising into the new –  
with all the dangerous privileges and responsibilities that then accompany the new life  
as it sets her out in the as yet unredeemed world  
(hence the need to turn our backs on all that is wrong with this world:  
the devil, rebellion, deceit, corruption, evil and sin).

Baptism is not magic.

It's not a conjuring trick with water.

Nor is it simply a visual aid.

Nor is it simply a tradition.

It is one of the points established by Jesus himself,

where heaven and earth come together,

where new creation, resurrection life, appears within the midst of the old.

This may seem terrifying and unapproachable or bewildering and overwhelming

but God is inviting us, through baptism, to share in his life, to share in his holiness;

a holiness revealed by his Son, Jesus as welcoming, cleansing and healing.

There is a word of warning though:

God is not to be taken lightly or casually;

The Gospel is not to be taken lightly or casually;

Christianity is not to be taken lightly or casually;

Yes there are Christian values.

Yes there are Christian virtues.

Yes there are ways to live them out.

But sometimes to live out the gospel is take on the forces of this world:

the culture of death

that treats human life as disposable before it can even start to live in the world,  
that treats people according to their use or value;  
the culture of gross materialism and consumerism  
that attaches human worth to property,  
that attaches human value to wealth,  
that creates spiritual bankruptcy;  
the culture of lust:  
that distorts human nature,  
that destroys human relationships,  
that devalues human sexuality.

When we take on those forces,  
the sin, the evil and everything that is wrong with this world  
we do so, because we have turned towards Jesus,  
submitted to him and acknowledged  
that he alone is the way, the truth and the life  
and the only way to God the Father.  
That he enables us, encourages us to live as the gospel would have us live,  
to live with  
love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, humility and self-control.  
To affirm the life of God in all the world.

This is a mighty calling.  
Willow, baptised today,  
won't know much about all of this,  
but as she grows it will be duty and responsibility  
of her parents and Godparents to bring her up in the faith  
and make her aware of what has been promised on her behalf.  
As she grows in her faith,

she will be a witness  
to the faith of her parents and Godparents.  
Today, she is being brought into the family of God  
and she will go on from her  
to grow into the new life  
that will begin for her at the baptismal font.  
All of them will need the support and prayer of you,  
their family and friends  
in this difficult but deeply rewarding undertaking  
for you too, have a role to play.

The Lord adds to his number with every passing day  
and now Willow has been brought by her parents  
to become part of God's world.  
In a few moments, underneath the symbolism and prayer,  
will be a decisive and dramatic moment in which Willow  
will be baptised into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus  
and be marked as his own forever.

We will be reminded of our own baptism  
and the promises that were either made on our behalf  
or ones that we made ourselves.

And today God challenges us to consider how far  
we have made the gospel, the life of Jesus our own life  
and whether we still have much ground to cover.

If you have been baptised  
you will know that it is the forefront of Christian living;  
because it is the foundational event for all serious Christian living,  
all dying to sin and all coming alive with Christ.

If you haven't been baptised, if you are not yet Christian,  
then I urge you to deeply consider whether God is also calling you, today, to be baptised,  
to live as one of his people this world.

Life and death have been set before us.

Choose life.