

**Sermon Matthew 3:3—17 Brundall 9.45 & 11.15 17<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

Today is the second in the sermon series on discipleship series, the theme is “Intimacy leads to affirmation”

This morning’s reading about Jesus’ baptism will be a familiar story to most of us. Jesus come to John the Baptist and asks to be baptised. Despite John initially saying he wasn’t worthy to baptise Jesus, Jesus is baptised. The Holy Spirit is seen to descend like a dove and God’ voice is heard confirming Jesus as God’s son, whom God loves. Prior to his baptism Jesus hadn’t done any miracles, but he still gets affirmation from God his Father.

Many of us won’t remember their baptism having been baptised as a baby. I clearly remember my baptism; 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1968 at St Mary’s Church, Beddington, in Surrey. I stood next to the font, wearing a white dress my mother had made, (it was awful!) along with some friends from the youth group. We each held a placard with our names and were presented to Bishop John Robinson, who at that time was the Bishop of Woolwich. Unlike Jesus, who was immersed in the river, I only had water poured over my head. No dove appeared, God’s voice wasn’t heard, but I felt different. I had been attending Church for a few years and knew Jesus was my Saviour, but this day really felt that my relationship with God moved to a more personal level. I was at the early stages, an apprentice learning more as time goes on.

The television programme “The Apprentice” shows some young people hoping to be employed by Alan Sugar. They are set various tasks in teams; the losing team then has one of them “fired” and leave the process. Many of the young people have been very successful in their own sphere, but here they were taking on tasks that, for many of them, were outside their comfort zone. There were ups and downs, but during each task there were set backs and also things were learnt. At times they pleased Alan Sugar, but at other times they felt far away from their goals. They were each on their own journey.

We may have got to know God in a Damascus Road type experience or our understanding and love of God may have developed gradually over time. The Holy Spirit helps us learn more and grow closer to God. Our relationship develops not like a train journey from one station to another, but more like a country road winding up a hill in a circular fashion. All of us are on our own

spiritual journey, each of us at a different place. Sometimes moving upwards or at other times taking time to stand still, to absorb what we have learnt before moving on.

With any relationship there are changes as the relationship develops. When we met our partner for the first time, we may have only known a few things about them, but as we know more about them the relationship develops, becoming closer.

When we set out on a journey we sometimes need a map to guide us. So with our spiritual journey we may need some guidance. We can be helped in this by reading the Bible, coming to one of our GIFT group, speaking to other Christians, and in quiet times listening to God. Our relationship with God can grow through learning more about Jesus' and God's relationship with us.

At his baptism Jesus heard God's voice saying "this is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Just as Jesus was affirmed by his Father, we can come closer to God in our spiritual journey. God's affirmation is that he loves us, unconditionally. Understanding God's affirmation is often the key to releasing people into discipleship. God delights in seeing his children open up to him. God gives us affirmation; we work *from* God's affirmation not *for* it. Working to become more like Jesus in the way we act, the way we serve others is helped by God's affirmation. Our knowing God, our intimacy, with him enables God's affirmation.

The Message version of Romans chapter 8 verses 29 to 30 puts it like this "God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him. After God made that decision of what his children should be like, he followed it up by calling people by name. After he called them by name, he set them on a solid basis with himself. And then, after getting them established, he stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what he had begun."

I said earlier that at my baptism I felt different, perhaps the words from a worship song by Dave Bilborough sums this up:

I am a new creation, no more in condemnation,  
here in the grace of God I stand.

And I will praise you Lord, and I will sing of all that you have done,  
A joy that knows no limit, a lightness in my spirit,  
here in the grace of God I stand.

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