

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 8 January New Beginnings

Pray A Happy New Year to you. Pray that we might all be open to where God intends to take us in 2017 and in particular that we might be set free to begin some new things for God.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Matthew 3:13-17. (You may also wish to take a look at Acts 10:34-43).

Background Here we have an account of Jesus' baptism by John. For Matthew, it is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and an affirmation for Jesus at least of God's hand on that ministry. (Perhaps it is not unreasonable, given Jesus' real humanity, that he is given that encouragement). Notice John's initial reluctance and Jesus' willingness to reverse the expected roles – an early sign of his servant leadership? While the focus ought to be on the start of Jesus' ministry the passage also has implications for our engagement in God's mission. The Acts passage gives us an example of God surprising his people and our need to remain open to change.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. John wasn't hidebound by rules and regulations – are we too much so? Yet, John questioned whether it oughtn't to be Jesus baptising him. What other examples can you think of where Jesus turns things of their head? How many modern day leaders would be so ready to serve others? (in the real sense of service!!) In what ways demonstrate a different leadership?
2. Jesus didn't say that John was altogether wrong. "Let it be so for now". How do these words and his actions show that he is more concerned to do what God requires than to be constrained by human rules? Yet, later he urges people to Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. How do we determine what we should do? How does "for in this way we shall all do what God requires" help?
3. It would seem as though this was a personal affirmation to Jesus – the Spirit of God appeared to him as a dove which alighted on him. Here at the beginning of his public ministry Jesus receives a special blessing from God. Does this ring any bells with Jesus closeness to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane? We don't often talk about the Trinity and the word is not used in scripture but is the Trinity not very much at work here? How significant is it that God appears more obviously to be working in his different persons (Father, Son and Spirit) **together** at especially key points in Jesus' ministry? How might we be more open to God working in this way at key points our ministry and mission? (Remember Peter in Acts).
4. The affirmation "This is my beloved Son" may not have been altogether public but it could well have been for John as well as Jesus. Faith is important but as with Jesus and even more so we are human and affirmation and encouragement can be a real help in living out our lives and in particular in serving God. Why are we so afraid of affirming one another? Are we just trying to avoid folk becoming big headed or is there more to it? It is not unspiritual to receive (or even to require) encouragement – it is a real spiritual gift. How many people, potentially, are in a position to offer encouragement? To need it? Why then is it in such short supply? What can we do to rectify matters?
5. Jesus (and Peter in Acts 10) were able to embark on significantly new phases of ministry and mission. What might be in store for us in 2017 – what new phases might there be for us? How would a greater openness to God's leading and one another's encouragement help?

Prayer Lord, help us to be open to new things, new opportunities to share in your ministry and mission, your blessing in it – and to giving and receiving encouragement that this might be a good year for you and for your kingdom as well as for us. Amen.