

On Jordan's bank: Mark 1.4-11

Thanks to Rod Hill for today's TFTD. The picture shows the Baptism site at Yardenit, where the river Jordan flows out of the Sea of Galilee on its way south. We joined crowds of pilgrims gathering there to re-affirm our baptismal vows. The real site of Jesus' baptism is probably further down the Jordan valley, closer to Jerusalem — but the site is being cleared of land-mines and is not yet open to pilgrims.



One of the greatest privileges of ministry for me, to date, has been leading a couple of pilgrimages to ‘The Land we like to call Holy’, to use the phrase of a former Dean of Jerusalem, John Tidy.

On one occasion I was privileged to share in a renewal of wedding vows in the chapel at Cana in Galilee, and my mother and father were one of the couples who wanted to do that. What a privilege. On another occasion one of our Church members approached me to enquire if it was possible for her to be baptised in the Jordan. She was well in her eighties, a stalwart of the Church, but had never been baptised. So, when we reached the point where Jesus was, reputedly, baptised in the Jordan we stopped and gather round as I baptised Wyn in the River Jordan. It’s a privilege that I shall never forget.

There is, of course, some dispute as to the precise location of Jesus’ baptism, to which Mark refers, but the basic points are clear, at least as Mark makes them. Not only was Jesus baptised in the water of the Jordan, the Spirit descended upon him and a voice from heaven saying “You are my Son, the Beloved;^[d] with you I am well pleased.”

All of us, at some point in our lives need to hear God saying to us “You are my child,

with you I am well pleased.”

It’s easy to allow ourselves, especially in Lent, to wallow in our own sinfulness and penitence. Of course, it’s entirely appropriate to be mindful of our own sinfulness, but we also need to hear the voice of God saying “You are my child, the Beloved; [d] with you I am well pleased.”

So, on Sunday, as you come to church, come with a spirit of penitence and reflection (don’t we always) but come too, with a spring in your step as you hear the voice of God encouraging you on your journey of faith – “With you I am well pleased!”

Of course, Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan, like Wyn’s baptism in the Jordan, was a turning point in his journey with God. So too, for us to hear the encouraging voice of God is often an important turning point in our journey with God.

The hymn writer Michael Perry puts it like this, in his adaptation of an ancient hymn:

1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh:
awake and listen for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings.

2 Let every heart be cleansed from sin,
make straight the way for God within,
and so prepare to be the home
where such a mighty guest may come.

3 For you are our salvation, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward
without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

Jordanis oras praevia Charles Coffin (1676 - 1749) translated by John Chandler (1806 - 1876) adapted by Michael Perry (Word and Music) (1942 - 1996)

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18th February 2021