



The Baptism of Jesus (2)

When ever you look in magazines, these days, you often find list of questions to be answered. At the end you can find out what sort of person you are. Many of these articles are all about the relationship between men and women. Many articles instead of answering questions have lists of what men look for in women or what women look for in men. [So here is list of what women look for in men:](#)

Original list at age22:

Handsome, charming, financially successful, a caring listener, witty, in good shape, dresses with style, appreciates the finer things, full of thoughtful surprises,

Revised list at age 32:

Nice looking, prefer hair on head, opens car doors, holds chairs, has enough money for a nice dinner, listens more than talks, laughs at my jokes, carries bags of groceries with ease, owns at least one tie, appreciates a good home cooked meal, remembers his birthdays and anniversaries, seeks romance at least once a week.

Revised list age 42:

Not too ugly, bald head ok, doesn't drive off till I am in the car, nods his head when I am talking, occasionally laughs at my jokes, is in good enough shape to re-arrange the furniture, wears a shirt that covers his stomach, shaves most weekends,

Revised list age 62:

Keeps hair in nose and ears hair trimmed, doesn't scratch or belch in public, doesn't nod off to sleep when I am venting, doesn't retell the same joke too many times, is in good enough shape to get off the couch at weekends usually wears matching socks and underwear, appreciates a good TV diner, remembers your name on occasion, shaves most weekends

Revised list age 72

Doesn't scare small children, remembers where the bathroom is, only snores lightly when I sleep, remembers why he is laughing, is in good enough shape to stand up himself, usually wears some clothes, likes soft food, remembers where he has left his teeth, remembers that it is the weekend.

Revised age 92:

Breathing!



I wonder if God had a list of what he looked for in us, what would be on it. This morning I want to look at two things that I think God would look for in us. Today is traditionally kept as the Sunday on which we remember the baptism of Jesus, by John the Baptist. It is from this event that I think these two things arise.

At the beginning of chapter 3 before today's reading we here the following:

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' "

Matthew 3:1 - 6 NIV

From this I believe John follows on from all the prophets of Israel. Though his was a special calling to prepare the way for Jesus. But never the less he stands in the mould of all the previous prophets.

Some people think prophecy is about for telling the future. They think that the prophet's role was to let people know what was going to happen. Whilst prophets did sometimes let people know what was going to happen, their main role was as one writer put it to '**tell forth God's word**'. In other words they were to tell the people what God wanted to say to his people.

In particular the prophets of Israel were always speaking against the covenant that God had made with the children of Israel. This covenant that included the law, particularly as contained in the 10 commandments. Time and time again the prophets had to challenge the hearers to return to following God. This was because time after time the children of Israel went after false Gods. They effectively turned their backs on God and were going in a different direction. Most of the story of the Old Testament is taken up with the continual turning away from God of his children. He had to regularly punish them by allowing them to be conquered and taken into captivity. Some people think that the God of the Old Testament is a harsh God. What we often fail to see is God's heart of love. For he said through Jeremiah, who incidentally we think of as a gloomy prophet the following:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Jeremiah 31:2 - 3 NIV

We know that John writing to the early church says: *God is love.* 1 John 4:8

God's punishments were meant to lead the people returning to following God. Mainly God was trying to grab their attention and make them realise their foolishness in.

Before Jesus starts his ministry, John comes preaching in the desert of Judea as some translations put it. It was not strictly a desert like, say the Sahara desert; it was more a wilderness; in that there were very few people living in this region.



The main message that John proclaims is:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

It is interesting that he not only calls the people to repent but in the same breath says the kingdom of heaven is near. When Jesus spoke, his main message was always about the kingdom of God. He would say the same things, the kingdom is near you & the kingdom is within you.

So John’s baptism was baptism as a sign of repentance. So one of the main things that would be on God’s list, is that we have a willingness to enter into repentance. This is the first thing I want us to look at briefly this morning.

Now this word repentance is often misunderstood by people. It has not fared very well in some of the early translations of the Bible. In some of the early translations, the word penitence was used. So people thought that repentance was us doing things to demonstrate how sorry we were for the sins we had committed. So the idea of sackcloth and ashes comes to mind. That if we show enough depth of sorry, God will forgive us. This almost seems to say that we can earn forgiveness.

But the Christian gospel is the good news of the Grace of God, demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ. God freely forgives us, because of the death of Jesus. (1126 words (say 5.5 minutes))

The Greek word used in the New Testament for repentance is **Metanoeo**. It means ‘to change one’s mind’.

I don’t know about you, but there are times when instead of going God’s way, I have turned away from him. As Paul says, I do the things I shouldn’t do, and I have not done those things that I should have done.

Repentance is the decision to turn around, effectively to change my mind, and face in God’s direction. God forgives me freely because of Jesus death. But I still need to acknowledge my sin and to make a conscious decision to return to God’s way.

This communion service provides a great opportunity to truly repent.

During the confession we say the following:

We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.

And the president says at the beginning of the prayer of absolution:

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins.



And in the invitation to eat the bread and drink the wine, the president says:

*You then, who truly and earnestly repent of your sins,
and are in love and charity with your neighbours,
and intend to lead a new life,
following the commandments of God
and walking from henceforth in his holy ways:
draw near with faith,
and take this holy sacrament to your comfort;*

So the first thing that might be on God's list is a willing to repent. I believe that like forgiveness it is conscious decision. Just as I chose to forgive people, so I choose to repent. It is not necessarily an emotion or feeling. No it is a choice I make. It involves my will choosing to align itself with God.

One interesting point in passing, was did Jesus allow John to baptise him. For this baptism was a baptism of repentance. Jesus had no need to repent. In fact in the passage John says:

"I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?" Matthew 3:13

Jesus reply is not very helpful in understanding why Jesus was baptised by John, as he says:

"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Matthew 3:15

This may be a good question to ask the Andrew Knowles who is the Canon Theologian at the Cathedral.

But one thing I draw from it, is that as Jesus is the model we follow, it is imperative that we do truly repent from our sin and turn and face God.

The second and final thing that I think God would put on our list comes just before today's passage where Jesus is baptised. John the Baptist says:

"I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Matthew 3:11 – 12 NIV

John says that the one who follows him, which is Jesus, will baptise people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. This appears to be two things, but today I want to put them together. In many place the Holy Spirit is symbolised by and through fire.



We remember the incident when Moses was confronted by a burning bush. God spoke to him, so we can see that the presence or Spirit of God is associated with fire. When the followers of Jesus waited in the upper room and the Holy Spirit came upon them; it was symbolised by tongues of fire.

On this pulpit exchange let us remember the Salvation Army's motto: **Blood and Fire.**

So in many places in the Bible the Holy Spirit is associated with fire.

One of the problems is that we so often in today's society, associate fire with the negative thought of destruction. But one of the great Biblical meaning of fire is that of refining. We see this, particularly in the refiners fire in the book of Malachi.

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Malachi 3:2 - 3 NIV

In those days if you wanted to refine a precious metal, such as silver or gold, you heated it in a crucible. As the metal turned to liquid all the impurities would float to the surface. The refiner would then scrape these impurities or dross from the surface of the liquid metal. He would repeat this process at regularly intervals. He would know the metal was pure when he could see his face in the surface of the metal.

God want this for our lives that eventually he can Jesus reflected in our lives.

The way he often does this is to allow us to go through testing times. Sometimes evangelists can make it sound as if becoming a Christian will insulate us from all difficulties and problems. That God will wrap us up in some spiritual cotton wool, and we will not suffer.

This is not the case; we will often go through difficult or testing times. Peter writes in his first letter:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:5 - 7 NIV

So the difficulties and testing times we go through can be used to refine our faith.



In February 2003, my father died. He was 91, but we weren't prepared for his death. Then over the next three weeks or so, we saw Sue's mum pass away before our eyes. We had just put the two funerals behind us, when my daughter rang us. She had gone for a 12 week scan as she was expecting her first child and our first grand child. But she was informed that the baby had died at six weeks into the pregnancy. This was a very difficult time for us. It is about the only time that I have shouted out against God.

But I think both Sue and I can honestly say, that it helped to refine our faith. It drove us to turn to God and seek his face. It was if you like part of the refining fire that God allows in order to purify and increase our faith.

So this morning I would say two of the things on God's list would be our willingness to repent and to allow refining fire of the Holy Spirit to purify our lives. This communion service is an ideal opportunity to seek God in a true attitude of repentance. It can also as we feed on Jesus through the bread and wine, prepare us to allow God's fire of the Holy Spirit to refine our faith.

AMEN