

## Bennochy church: 1st May 2016

The song was called, *There's something in the water*. I am not a great fan of swimming and I am not a good swimmer. Imagine, swimming at a beach where you know there have been sharks spotted - Australia, South Africa. It would always be in the back of my mind, there could be something else in the water! Big, with teeth! In Scotland I suppose, the example might be the jelly fish.

There was a great story a few years back in a medical journal of a patient who was recovering from an operation and the staff could not work out why the person's wounds were not healing properly. There was a source of infection they could not identify. It turned out that the patient was being visited by someone who was placing holy water brought back from the Jordan river, over the wounds. There was something in that water and it wasn't good! True story.

Jesus decided to be baptised by a man called John and he was baptised in the river Jordan. John wanted it to be the other way around, that is another story, but he agreed to do it. Water had always been a symbol of cleansing and change and if we were following the Orthodox tradition of infant baptism we would have a font big enough to put the child right under the water and out again. (show picture) That is what you call a font. I want one of them!

*The Orthodox priest said something like, "I hate baptismal Sundays. People start lining up at five in the morning and fight to be first." My friend was surprised, thinking that this should be a special and joyous Sunday. "You don't understand," the priest said, "because you practice believer's baptism. In our church we baptism infants, we do it by immersion, and we do it three times, for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." So think about it. What happens to a baby if you stick it in cool water, and do it three times? It will cry, but what else? It will wee-wee! And the priest said that they do not change the water during the ceremony. So if your kid is going up for baptism at that church, and so are five other kids, you would find yourself at church at five in the morning on baptism Sunday and fighting for the first spot also!*

For Jesus and others who were baptised by John they were also lowered right under the water as a symbol of new life. The old has gone, left in the depths of the water, and the new rises out, now with a special relationship with God.

According to the story we read Jesus baptism was dramatic. Before we describe that...

*Out in the water stood two short pastors who looked to be in their 70s; the water was almost chest-high on them.*

*The church members stood on the bank, along with the three people to be baptized, two women and Goliath. And when I say*

*Goliath, I mean this guy was tall and muscular; he must have been over six feet tall. Well, the first woman goes out into the middle of the creek and stands between the two pastors. Now, I have seen people go through immersion baptism before, but I had only seen one pastor involved. Here there were two, but I guessed it was due to their age and the swiftly-moving water. Anyway, so both the pastors put their hands behind her head and she is lowered backwards into the water. Then the pastors lift her up out of the water and it is finished. The next woman goes out and is baptized in the same way. Then it is Goliath's turn.*

*He wades out to the pastors and stands between them. As he stands there, I see that he is about a foot taller than the pastors and I think, "This is going to be interesting." Well, they reach up and hold his head from behind and then he goes back into the water. That was the easy part, but now they have to get him up. As they are both struggling to raise him up, somebody yells from the shore: "He didn't go all the way down!" I am sure both pastors thought, "Drat," but what could they do? They lowered him back into the water and then brought him back up.*

Did you think it was going to be more dramatic than that! I don't think the Jordan is that fast flowing. But back to the dramatic story of Jesus baptism- the heaven opened. Imagine what that must have looked like! The Spirit of God comes upon Jesus in the form of a dove and Jesus special relationship is cemented in these words, "*this is my own dear son, with whom I am pleased*".

Did anyone see the heavens open? Did we see the visible spirit of God? Did we hear his voice? What happened? Did the baptism not work? Where was God? It would have been good to witness the dramatic. The light, the sound, but mystery does not shout its presence and the miracles of God are often found in the ordinary things of life.

My words are not special. They conferred nothing upon Rose. There is nothing in this water that makes it special, that actually makes baptism 'happen'. The gift of life has already been born. Baptism does not require water to give God's love to Rose. That love has already been freely given by God through Jesus Christ. That is what we believe.

If there is nothing in the water, then what is given by this act? Here's a thought. Do we stand apart as pure spectators watching God act, or do we have a role to play? There has to be more to baptism than a cute child brought into church and carried up the aisle. Maybe, part of God's love to Rose is our contribution to this act of baptism, and that is, our promise to support her and her family and that is a big responsibility to be taken seriously.

In baptism, God acts in ways we cannot describe, the mystery and miracle of love; after baptism, that is where we come in, the challenge of God, to each one of us, parents, family, friends and members of the church. God has shown his love. How will we now respond? Amen