

water that John offers ~ we can accept that preparation for what is to come ~ but the next step of our faith journey is really tough ~ we are expectant for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the fire of the flame of faith but at the same time we are fearful of it and keep it at arms length!

Is that where you are in your relationship with God?

I know there are times when that is where I find myself and I have to wait and expect that some of God's children will help me to find the trust to bend my arms and so allow God closer, to open my arms and embrace the friend I have in Jesus and know there is nothing to fear because He stands with me. But you know I can remember clearly when I insisted on keeping my arms out straight because it felt safer! When I was afraid to be on God's threshing floor in case I ended up in the chaff that He would burn up!

When you and I can bend our arms ~ then God can work in and through our lives ~ Luke writes in the Acts of the Apostles of how Peter and John were sent to Samaria where they prayed that the believers would receive the Spirit ~ those people had only got as far as being prepared by the teaching of John the Baptist! What happened? Peter and John, children of God, encouraged and ministered to those still fearful and doubting and they received the Spirit ~ they took the next and final step of faith.

Each of us has the spark of the Spirit within us ~ and when that is fanned into the flame of faith we know what it feels like not to be afraid so when fear knocks again we can shut it out!

In a minute we are going to sing "O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee."

~ first let's sit quietly, aware of those around us and make those words our prayer. If the Spirit alerts you to someone close by who needs encouragement ~ then don't be afraid to make eye contact and be the person to offer that encouragement or reassurance. At the end of Service we will create a time for further prayer because Immanuel Prays ~ you and I pray ~ and God hears and responds. Amen.



Baptism of the Lord ~ 13th January 2019

Heavenly Father,
at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as
your Son:
may we recognize him as our Lord
and know ourselves to be your
beloved children;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.
Amen.

Readings:

Isaiah 43:1-7

OT page 682

Acts 8:14-17

NT page 123

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

NT page 57

(NIV used in sermon preparation).

This morning our Collect thanks God for revealing Jesus as His son at the Jordan and asks that we will recognise Him as our Lord and know ourselves to be God's beloved children.

We have prayed that we want to know Jesus!

That prayer is very important to us at Immanuel ~ even though as a Collect it is only prayed once a year!

How important is it?

Look at the front cover of your Service Order this morning ~ what do you see?

You see our church logo which expresses our vision as a church ~

"to know Jesus and to make Him known"

The Collect may only be prayed once a year ~ but it is our constant prayer as God's children here at Immanuel & St. Andrew.

Week by week we are exploring our faith ~ what God desires for us and from us and how we respond to Him and build our relationship with Him and today our readings encourage us to continue to do that in very specific ways!

Isaiah encourages us in many ways ~

1. He reminds us that God created us and we are all His children.
2. He reminds us that God has redeemed us ~ called us by name and we are His!
3. He tells us that because we are redeemed we do not fear!

Then Isaiah does something that we may not be expecting or even think necessary ~ he reminds us of the times and things that may fill us with fear! If it is important enough for Isaiah to share as words for God then it is important enough for us to reflect on!

What things are listed that might make us fearful?

1. When we pass through the waters, the rivers and seas of life ~ they will not sweep over us. We have sung "Eternal Father strong to save" and I encouraged you to think of the waves and the perils of the sea as the turbulent encounters you have in life! What does Isaiah tell us about them ~ he says they will not sweep over us ~ they will not wash us away even when we feel like we are drowning!
2. When we walk through fire we will not be burned, we will not be engulfed and destroyed. Why? Because God uses fire to burnish ~ to perfect ~ to bring us to wholeness and to our full potential.

None of that comes easily or necessarily feels comfortable! We are apt to hit out at God when we encounter situations and circumstances that hurt ~ that take us out of our comfort zones and that we simply cannot understand or explain away.

What things do you feel like that about? There will be things ~ and you and I have to learn to recognise them for what they are ~ we have to accept that there are times when we will not have answers and more ~ we have to come to a place in our relationship with God where we stop getting wound up and annoyed that we do not have answers and feel inadequate and trust that God is standing with us and is keeping us safe. We have to come to terms, as Christians, that our safety is primarily about our faith and the well-being of our relationship with God and not about material and physical health ~ which may or may not be

threatened! When we find we have come to terms with being focused on Jesus as the centre of our lives ~ deliberately putting Him first through prayer, praise and our petitions to Him then we feel that Peace that passes all understanding.

That is why Isaiah reminds us of how tough being human beings is ~ so that he can re-iterate that through everything, because we are precious and honoured in God's sight, ~ because God loves each one of us ~ He will always protect and provide for us whatever the turmoil that surrounds us might be! That can include taking us to Himself!

Isaiah gives us reason to not be afraid ~ we are not afraid because we know in our hearts that God is with us, not only with us but God will reassure us when we have doubts ~ by putting others of faith around us to encourage and reassure ~ to stand with us in the pain and mess we face. Those people that God places around us may be unexpected and come from the ends of the earth but they too are God's children and His desire is that we live and work together.

At the time John the Baptist started his ministry, the Spirit prepared the hearts of many people so that they were waiting expectantly and wondering if John would be the Messiah that their scriptures (the Old Testament) told them would come. They were about to feel the waves and rivers rise up against them in the form of the authorities and priests of the day who were not expectant and did not have that personal relationship God offers!

It is really tough when the resistance to God's love comes from within God's people!

What did John tell the expectant people?

He told them he could start them thinking in the right direction but the powerful one who was coming would reveal all to them ~ one that John was eager to listen to and follow as well ~ one who John felt humbled to serve.

Many of us feel comfortable enough walking in the Baptism of