

We receive God's Approval and Affirmation when we do the right thing for the right reason at the right time. Matt 3:13-17

In our daily Christian faith one important aspect of living it is knowing that we have God's approval and affirmation, as we obediently follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the son of God and the head of the church, righteously in a way pleasing to our heavenly father. Our scripture reading this morning is an example from the lives of Jesus and John illustrating to us God's loving and righteous approval, His very own affirmation as we would seek to do the right thing, for the right reason, at the right time.

There was story in the Herald this week of a 47year old lady who is "excited to be alive". She was standing in the check out queue of an Auckland hardware store recently wearing a tank top. She heard the voice of man from behind her say "Excuse me, love, you know you have a black mole on your back you should be really concerned about."

She thought to herself that this guy was attempting to use a nice new pickup line, he wants to chat me up. So, she turns around and talks to him and it turns out that he was a genuinely caring man whose niece had died age 25 I think of cancer. So the lady decided to immediately seek medical attention and the black mole turned out to be an invasive melanoma.

She was operated on last week having the malignant melanoma removed, and at this stage it appears that all the cancer has been removed and that it did not travel throughout her body. If the man had not spoken up and pointed out the dangerous looking spot when he did, she would never have known that she was suffering from cancer which, if it had not been picked up within six months, it would have been surely terminal. She is so thankful for this man in doing what he did and is currently trying to trace him so that she might tell him how pleased she is that when he saw the mole he acted as he did, not hesitating to speak up and do the right thing at the right time for the right reason.

As God's son, Jesus knew the task to which he had been called. His work was to manifest and reveal on earth as God in Man the caring and unyielding love of God, personified in His life and ministry, and exemplified through his sacrificial death on a cross. He had come to point out and to deal with humanity's dangerous black spot of sin – the cause of eternal death and provide the eternal life-giving and healing treatment for it. Jesus was 30 years old when his moment arrived. He had been faithfully living in Nazareth for perhaps the last 25 years at home with his mother, his siblings and dutifully working in the

carpenter's shop, heading up the household business after the passing of Joseph. Then the time came for him to do the right thing.

Our challenge too as Christians is to recognise the moment in which God calls us forth, and once we step forth, to seek out and do the work of fulfilling the task to which we have been called. In effect, to do the right thing at the right time, for the right reason, and in the process, to experience and receive the knowledge that we are lovingly affirmed and approved by God when we do so.

Now when Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John the Baptist, although related John may not have actually known who Jesus was at the time because he had not yet received the signs that followed the baptism. So how did he know that this was Jesus the Messiah? Well John's baptism was for repentance of sins which meant when you came to him to be baptised, in your pre baptism interview, you were required to openly confess your sins to him [3:6] so that he could then baptise you with water for repentance of sin [3:11].

So, when Jesus arrives that day, in the preliminary interview which in everyone else's case was a confession of sins as a guarantee of repentance. As far as meeting up with his long lost cousin from Nazareth, John was utterly convinced that he was in the presence of One who had no sins to confess and therefore was his moral and spiritual superior. Which is why John reacts the way he does. He probably wanted to confess his own sins to Jesus on the spot as the humble man he was.

This is why John is quick to deter v14, to go as far as wanting to prevent such a baptism by forbidding, even prohibiting himself altogether from ever doing such a thing, with the type of response that we might use ourselves, "no way I am not doing this. I am not up for this because I actually need to be baptised by you, not the other way around."

And Jesus, undeterred v15, responds to John's question with this direct answer telling him to "Let it go John, give up this thinking of yours because just now at this very moment of time, in this way, we are doing the right and proper thing here. We about to fulfill, carry into effect, and bring to a complete realisation something very important here - 'God's righteousness'. A righteousness, which is, as it ought to be, the correct thinking and acting on this occasion, through which we enter the state and condition of being approved and acceptable to God. We need to do this now in order for the right thing to happen, right here, right now." Where upon John gives up and lets go of the idea that he should be baptised by his second cousin Jesus and instead goes ahead in righteous obedience baptising Jesus.

An important act because it serves as the public announcement of the beginning of Jesus' Messianic ministry. Whereby, Jesus fulfilled all righteousness because his baptism indicated that he was consecrated to God and although totally sinless himself, Jesus completely identified himself with humanity's fallen sinful state and became the substitute for our failure. Importantly serving then as an example to all who would ever make the decision to believe in and follow him with the resulting command -Be Baptised!

John immerses Jesus in the waters of the Jordan River v16 and as soon as Jesus rises up out of the water, at that very moment all three persons of the Trinity appear together. The expanse of the sky with all things visible in it opened up. Then through that opening to the most perfect and holy place, where God's eternal presence lives and dwells outside of our realm of time and space, from heaven, the Spirit of God came down either in the form of a dove or it descended peacefully, just like a dove but which ever it is it ends up coming to rest upon Jesus, in effect crowning him.

The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus as a visible symbol, not only to designate, confirm and announce his arrival as the Messiah but to anoint and fill him, equipping him for his Messianic ministry. Every messenger, servant and witness up until this time had been endowed or filled with the Spirit of God in order to fulfill their mission, now it was Jesus with a real and perceivable manifestation, just as the apostles who followed were to receive on the Day of Pentecost a few years later when the spirit as the sound of a rushing wind in the form of tongues of fire came to rest on their heads. What was perceived on this occasion as a dove was the Spirit of God and what was perceived as a voice was the word of God. The voice from heaven was God's own voice and testimony that He has broken the silence after hundreds of years and was once again revealing himself to humanity. To one and all this is a clear sign of the dawning of the Messianic Age.

This was God the Father's voice speaking from heaven, heard on earth, "This is my son". Officially stating that Jesus was consecrated and officially approved by Him and along with the Holy Spirit authenticating Jesus' Messianic sonship. This is an echo of Psalm 2:7 which identifies Jesus as the royal messianic son of God whom God loved. "Whom I love" perhaps identifies Jesus with the old patriarch and father of faith, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own dear beloved son Isaac [Gen 22:2]. It also identifies Jesus linking him with the suffering servant on whom the Lord was going to lay the pain, suffering and iniquity of us all of Isaiah 42:1 when God said "with him I am well pleased."

God the Father spoke from heaven to approve, authenticate, and importantly bring his Son Jesus Christ the divine-human Messiah a greatly encouraging word to begin his earthly ministry with, to affirm him absolutely in his mission, ministry, and purpose.

Jesus here, along with John, was doing the right thing for the right reason at the right time.

As far as affirmation goes there is none greater than God's affirmation- that you are on the right track doing the right thing the right way bringing glory to God in worship and life today and every other day through your Christian witness- in your marriage, family life, job, service in the community, and in serving and using your spiritual gifts to build up the church, the body of Christ.

Is this not what we all want to hear direct from the voice of God the heavenly Father? An encouraging and affirming word that states in v17:

First of all - I am God's child – that I belong to God. That you and I, he acknowledges each one of us as His own. Such an encouraging affirmation that would have our own spirits cry out, "Abba Father, I am you child - I belong to you!" And,

Secondly, building on the first that - God loves me. That God loves you. A truth that elicits the response from within "Abba Father, I am yours and I am loved by you."

And Thirdly. With me, God is well pleased. "Abba Father, I belong to you, I am loved by you, and you are pleased with me."

May these words from our heavenly father serve as Words of encouragement, words of affirmation and of approval for you today.

How do we know that we are to be the blessed recipients of such a divine message today?

Simply, this is the truth of what happens when you follow obediently in Jesus' footsteps, doing what is right and proper on a daily basis, following God's will, plan and purpose for your life.

In other words, when we do what is the right and proper thing at the time then we fulfill all righteousness. To remain in such a right relationship with God through Jesus often requires the daily confessing and repenting of our sinful disobedience and rebellion just as John the Baptist was teaching the people and as Jesus did in the Lord's Prayer. So, would you know this voice of divine blessing if you heard it? Could you distinguish it say in comparison to another voice?

N.B. Be careful and be aware of other competing voices that are not pleasing and do not serve to encourage us and build us up in the body of Christ, that originate from that most unholy trinity of the world, the flesh and the devil.

To wrap up this morning a starting point for obedience for a Christian believer is Baptism. In order to follow Jesus' grand example the right and proper thing to do is to be baptised after you have believed in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, repented of your sin and turned to God. Baptism is the next step of obedience in following Jesus in going through the public proclamation of your faith and wet entrance into his Body, the Church Universal that is the Christian Church with a Big 'C' overtime and throughout the world. The PCANZ acknowledges this by stating that to be considered a member of a Presbyterian church you must be baptised either as an infant or as a believer. We also offer rededication whereby someone who was baptised as an infant who wants to honour the prayers, commitment and dedication of those who brought them to be baptised as a child but has been specifically called by God as a repentant person later in life to be baptized as a believer, we do that here too.

It is all about listening to God's voice and then following Jesus in obedience to the waters of baptism.

Closing Challenge:

Is Christ's spirit dwelling within you calling you to the waters of Baptism today? Is that you? If it is then I encourage you to respond. Today, after the service is the right time, right place for the right reason to come and talk to me about it. Do this or whatever else it is that God has called you forth and purposed you to do and you will have God's very own affirmation, His loving and righteous approval as we do the right thing for the right reason at the right time.