

God's Will and Purpose (Matthew 3:13-end)

10:00am Holy Communion – 11th January 2026

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

<prayer>

The Internet began in 1993 in the form we now know it. Sometimes known as the World Wide Web, at its core it's a hugely dispersed database of information which can be accessed quickly from wherever you are. I'm sure many of us are used to making searches through Google or Yahoo - you can look up what you need but then you have to sift through the answers for the one you want, which could be quite a lot. **However, none of this sifting and choosing is left to chance, because you are being subtly manipulated.**

Can anyone remember the days of the Yellow Pages? Each and every home had a regional copy. It was a piece of British culture, but now almost completely replaced by the Internet. The way the Yellow Pages worked commercially was by the size of the advert on the page - companies paid more for bigger adverts. The world of Internet searching is different but does still keep that idea of trying to grab your attention by what you are shown. **Contained within web technologies such as Google**

is a kind of internal spirit – a kind of hidden Internet God, which you cannot see. You may have heard of *algorithms*. These are complex mathematical formulae for filtering large amounts of information, but in a way that drives you towards their advertising and product marketing. When you search the Internet, what you get back carries the *will and purpose of the one sending it to you*. So, companies can pay for their content to be seen on the first page of the search answers – which is where you are most likely to click on one of the links. It's a bit like having a bigger advert in the Yellow Pages. If you want to attract more attention, then you must pay more. **Do you realise that you are being subtly manipulated by technology?**

We are conscious of flesh and blood, whereas the computer is an electronic tool under your control. The two seemed very different to each other, like an artist and box of paints. But all that is now changing, because we are rushing headlong into the world of Artificial Intelligence. **If the Internet changed the world (and indeed it did), then artificial intelligence is going to change it all over again.**

Today's gospel is a very human moment of flesh and blood, but which is taken up by the will of **God who enters into humanity like a precious algorithm of God's good purpose**. Jesus comes to John the Baptist in the river Jordan to be infused with the desire of God – the arrival of the Holy Spirit upon him and into him. Jesus will go onwards from that moment to display the will and purpose of the one who sent him. **To put it very crudely, Jesus is God's way of advertising his love for us.**

[*'Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.'*](#)

Now the very spark of our own wisdom, intelligence and personality, our absolute nature and abilities are to some extent bound up in the biological strands of DNA which formulate us. We are who we are. The

life you have in you is very much *your life*, that is lived by you and no one else. God made you in his image, which we share with Christ, and He placed you with your talents into His creation to reflect His love for the world and each other.

It has long been the goal of science and engineering to produce artificial life. By life, I mean the ability to sense, make complex decisions, and to be able to carry them out. We humans are amazing, but we are not always very efficient. We need food and water, we like to be paid, we like to have rest, we get ill, we are emotional, often irrational, we might not like having to change, and our abilities can vary considerably. **So, our lives which can be amazing, intelligent and creative, yet be inefficient in a culture which demands growth and progress. It's quite a sad picture really, although growth and progress were not why we were created.**

In the theological world of church and faith, we speak of life as *spirit*. Just like Jesus, we can have God's spirit given to us, indeed we can seek it and ask for it. **We can be bound up and charged by God's Holy Spirit.** That precious gift always been understood as Christian purpose, discipleship, living a life of calling, worship and service. A good word for today from the gospel is that **we can fulfill our potential, not in terms of efficiency, but by the being as near as possible to the person who is Jesus Christ.** Yes, God can embed his purpose into us, but it is always for his very good purpose of love for all people, not for his own gain. **None of that can be made artificial.**

Looking at the gospel passage today it seems to have been important that Jesus was baptized. Indeed, this story is a milestone in the beginning of gospel narrative. Jesus is at the start-line of his public ministry. There seems to be the need for some sort of initial point, a highly visible God moment where something amazing is about to begin. That is often true of us too. When we begin something in God's name as

disciples, we start with a moment of prayerful commitment. We are going to get something done in faith, to **fulfill God's will and purpose in us.**

But why does Jesus even need a rite of passage like baptism when he is already the Son of God himself? Remember all those ways in which God sets out the nativity, so that we can know that Jesus is so special. Of what was Jesus actually supposed to be repenting, as John plunged him down into the cleansing waters? Does he not already possess all things? And who is John the Baptist to conduct this ceremony anyway? What semblance of authority does *he* carry to confer such a thing upon God's only Son? John the Baptist seems to be confused about that too because:

John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'

And what about that dove descending, bringing the Holy Spirit? Did Jesus not have that already anyway? And what on earth does it mean to '**fulfill all righteousness?**'

This passage has kept Christian scholars busy for centuries. There is a lot of theologizing that can be done here. **The most important thing to say is that as Jesus, stood in the River Jordan, open to God the Father and to receiving his very great Spirit of blessing. That moment is just the same experience that we can have.** Here, Jesus's earthly life becomes visibly dedicated to God's purposes, which begins now until some completion. Yes, Jesus is different from us, but not in the way that we both share the human experience of commitment and needing to have a good faithful purpose. **As always in the gospel, Jesus stands-in for us in all parts of his life and death.**

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God

descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

Think of all those gifts you received on Christmas Day. All that may now be passed, but I am thinking about the season of Epiphany now, and the season of Lent to come. **Justin and I are creating a Lent course to help us know the gift which God brings into our lives when we take his good will and purpose as our spirit of life.** We shall consider gifts such as renewal of our lives, the picture of better Kingdom to live within, the call to discipleship and his perpetual Holy Spirit which gives us all we need. I expect over the next two weeks to have that ready to go, with a very big advert indeed.

Epiphany is a most spiritual season, so try to stay open to God's will and purpose to give your life.

Amen