

+WEEKLY SERMON

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Baptism on the Margins

Matthew 3:13-end

It is no mistake that many churches have a font at the back, near the door. Baptism is the sacrament of our entrance into the faith, and we should be reminded of that entrance every time we walk into the church.

In our parishes we often witness baptisms as special, family times, with everyone in their best dress. Sometimes the baby wears an heirloom christening gown, handed down through the generations as a priest sprinkles water over their head.

In my time working with prisoners and ex-offenders, I've seen baptisms that are a lot rougher around the edges: in Lake Windermere at the end of October, in a bath salvaged from a scrap yard and even once, the candidate was 'dunked' in a wheely bin full of water in a warehouse carpark. No less special, or family, but very different.

When we picture holy moments, we often imagine grand cathedrals, stained glass, and buildings filled with awe and wonder. Yet Jesus' baptism happened far from any temple or palace. It took place in the wilderness, away from the civilisation of the city. It was a rugged location, far from the power and privilege of the temple.

The wilderness was a place on the margins. It's where people went when they didn't fit neatly into society's structures. John the Baptist's ministry drew crowds to this liminal space, and Jesus chose to begin his public life there, aligning himself with those who lived on the margins, not with the religious elites.

For us, it is a profound challenge to remember that God dwells everywhere, especially in the margins. If we want to encounter the fullness of God, we may need to step away from comfort and into spaces where the forgotten dwell.

The wilderness is not only geographical: It is wherever people feel unseen, unheard, or unloved. Jesus' baptism reminds us that God's presence is not confined to the familiar or the respectable. It flows from the margins, calling us to create communities of radical welcome and love.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

The voice from heaven declared Jesus 'Beloved' and that same truth echoes for every person, whether you were baptised in your great-grandmother's silk Christening gown, or in a wheely bin round the back of a warehouse. Our calling is to live that reality: to affirm dignity, extend grace, and build churches where all know they are loved.

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