

OBC: Baptism Service

Matt Gordon - Sunday 4 November 2018

The Ordinary and the EXTRA-Ordinary

I don't know about you, but sometimes it can feel like life is pretty ordinary.

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A typical, ordinary day for me is I get up, have some breakfast, feed the kids, get in a quick coffee, head into work, work the day, get home, have dinner, bath the kids, put the kids into bed, put my feet up, watch the news, catch up with my wife, have a tea to finish the day, go to bed.

Repeat the next day.

Maybe your day is similar to mine, or maybe you sometimes feel like you're on autopilot and the days have become weeks, the weeks have become months, and the months have become years. It's easy to fall into this mind-set and just go through the motions of life.

Because life is pretty ordinary. And we're good at doing this – I'm especially good at the part of putting my feet up at the end of the day. Just ask Roxy! I have my favourite Laz-Boy chair I like to sit in, and I put my feet up, and I go into my nothing box. It's pure bliss. Men – can you relate to this? We love our nothing boxes don't we? Our wives – maybe not so much.

But it's in our nothing box that we can fully zone out, escape the pressures of life, and think about really important things. Well, maybe not the last part.

An ordinary life is typically what we all are living.

Today is an ordinary day. It's a Sunday. In the month of November. 2018. Except really it's anything but ordinary. This morning both Kelly and Thomas have made an **extraordinary** decision. A decision to get wet and go through this thing called Baptism.

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It's an **extraordinary** day for them. They have made the public declaration of a personal commitment. They have said yes to follow God and Jesus' example of baptism. They have let their old ways end in the waters of baptism, and been risen to new life.

And so this morning we celebrate with them and we see that God uses the ordinary to do the **extraordinary**.

I'd like to focus on another person this morning, an ordinary person like you or I, who God also used to do the **extraordinary**. John the Baptist.

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John was a cousin of Jesus' and about six months older than him. If you've got your Bibles this morning let's go to the book of Matthew chapter 3 verse one.

This is about thirty years after Jesus was born. We don't know a lot about Jesus or John's upbringings; but we can assume that being family they did bump paths many times.

We'll read from verse one to seventeen.

But before we delve into this story let's pray.

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Matthew 3:1-17

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

*"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"*

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

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Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

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The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

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Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, 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, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

So what was John's role in the story? The ordinary in the extraordinary?

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Firstly, John prepares the way for Jesus

John was a man on a mission. He knew his purpose, the plan for his life, probably from an early age too. He was to prepare the way for his younger cousin. His job was to point people to Jesus.

John didn't have a "look at me" attitude. He was keen to get the spotlight off of him as soon as he could. The prophet Isaiah declared hundreds of years earlier John's role in the life of Jesus:

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He is the "voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'" (Isaiah 40:3)

John was an ordinary person who was given an **extraordinary** role in life. To prepare the way for Jesus. Imagine been given this task. It would be easy to get a big head and make it all about you, especially for John. "I'm so great, God has chosen me to prepare the path for my younger cousin, Jesus. I'm the older one and I've taught him so much growing up. I've helped shape him into the man he is today."

John doesn't do this, nor do I suggest that he even thought this way. I think he knew from early in his life that he was the curtain-raiser and Jesus was the main event. And if you think about it, this would actually have been quite hard for John, because during his life there were many people that came to him wanting to be baptised, wanting to hear what he had to say, wanting to receive what he had. The crowd attention and expectation could have got to him, but he never let it. He was grounded – someone who had his feet firmly on the ground. And he was comfortable in his own skin and the role he was given.

I wonder about us and the role God has given each of us. Are we comfortable with who God has created us to be, and our role in His story?

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I love it that every person in the body of Christ – God's family on earth – is important and has a role to play. No role is bigger or better than any other. But each role is necessary and significant. Whether you are a stay-at-home parent or a volunteer at an organisation; a business leader, school teacher, builder or pastor; an extrovert or an introvert; an up the front leader or behind the scenes server; a newly baptised Christian or you've been following Jesus most of your life – you are a vital member of God's family and you have a vital role to play in the family.

Imagine a family that doesn't work well together. No-one helps each other out; everyone expects each other to do things; communication is at the bare minimum; none of the family members invite other people into the home and life of the family; and everyone is just basically doing their own thing.

That is a dysfunctional family. That's a family where there are bound to be lots of problems, disagreements, tension and conflict. It's not healthy, growth doesn't happen naturally and people don't know their roles.

Now, imagine a family that does work well together. Each person helps each other out; there are no real expectations on anyone; there is good clear communication; other people are invited into the home and life of the family; and the family members work together for a common purpose.

That is a functional family. That's a healthy family. A family where growth naturally occurs and people know their roles. And that is a picture of God's family.

Here at OBC we are part of God's family. And I have to say that I think we as a church are doing really well at representing Him. Sure, we're not perfect but we strive to make people feel comfortable here; we share the love of Jesus in many different ways; and we help disciple people in their journey of faith.

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Discipleship is what I'm about and who I am. I'm a discipler. I'm not a big event person or evangelist. I don't do massive campaigns or talk to everyone I meet about Jesus. I'm a discipler who loves coming alongside people and helping point them to Jesus. I love having deep and meaningful conversations with people about life, faith and the big topics. I'm not very good at small talk and often struggle to know what to talk about next. But get me talking about Jesus and why having faith in Him and growing in our spiritual journey is important, and I think I do alright.

I think John the Baptist could have been similar. I don't think he was much about or good at small talk – but he was definitely good at pointing people to Jesus, preparing them for their Saviour and presenting the gospel to them. He knew his role.

If you're sitting here this morning and you don't think you have an important, valuable and necessary role in God's family – I want to say to you that you do. You have a role that you were specifically created for, and no-one else can do it.

And guess what? Your brother is John the Baptist. John, who ate locusts and wild honey, and was clothed in camel's hair. Just for a second, imagine him at a family reunion.

So first, John prepares the way for Jesus, second,

(SLIDE)

John preaches a gospel of repentance for the people

John was a preacher. And a good one at that too! He had one basic message – “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

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Imagine being known for one basic message your entire life. I guess John’s prep work wouldn’t have taken much, not like those of us who spend countless hours prepping for each message.

John simplified his message but his message was anything but simple.

See, John knew what was in the heart of his audience. Because he knew his own heart. He knew that people naturally lived to please themselves and their selfish desires. The life of each person is fundamentally opposed to God and His work in their life because of sin entering the world through Adam and Eve.

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We human beings are by our sinful nature selfish. We think about ourselves and we tend to think all we need are ourselves. We can get by and do okay without any God or dependence on others. God is a crutch for those who are weak; I don’t need God in my life.

But that couldn’t be any further from the truth.

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Originally we were created to be humble, dependent people on God. When God created Adam, He walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden and spent time with him. Adam was humble and dependent on everything for God. Eve was created because it was not good for Adam to be alone without a suitable helper, and together they had a wonderful relationship with each other and with God.

But you probably know what happened. Adam and Eve both chose to disobey God and listen to someone else’s voice. Their punishment was separation from God. And ever since then, you read through the Bible and you see that people’s natural state is a hard heart towards God and a desire to rule over others. The opposite of humility and dependence.

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“Humility is not thinking less about yourself; it means thinking about yourself less.” (C.S. Lewis) Dependence doesn’t mean you are helpless; it means you realise your need for help and support.

John the Baptist spoke into these issues and preached a gospel of repentance.

If you were here with us during the month of October, David McChesney preached a series on the four fundamentals for lifelong followers of Jesus.

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The first was about repentance from sin.

Repentance means to turn around. To do a 180. Godly repentance means acknowledging that there is a problem – in this case, separation from God – and accepting that there is a solution – which is forgiveness from God through the death of his Son Jesus on the Cross.

And this is not just a one-off thing either. Repentance is what's needed every time we sin against God. Having a heart that is softened towards Him and aware of when we mess up. And let's face it, we all mess up. We all make the wrong decisions. We all indulge in bad habits. We all commit sin. Anyone who says they don't is a liar – and lying is a sin.

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So John preached a gospel of repentance. He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

In 2009 there was an inspiring movie that came out called *The Blind Side*.

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You may recall it. The film chronicles the true story a Christian family who takes in a homeless young man and gives him the chance to reach his God-given potential.

Michael Oher, a traumatized boy becomes an All American football player and first round NFL draft pick with the help of a caring woman and her family.

At a recent fund-raiser, Sean Tuohy noted that the transformation of his family and Michael all started with two words. When they spotted Michael walking along the road on a cold November morning in shorts and a T-shirt, Sean's wife Leigh Ann uttered two words that changed their world. She told Sean, "Turn around."

They turned the car around, put Michael in their warm vehicle, and ultimately adopted him into their family.

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Those same two words can change anyone's life. Each time we turn around, we change directions in our life and God adopts us back into His family.

John was telling the people of his day, 'turn around.' Don't stay heading in the direction you're currently moving. There is something far greater here: the kingdom of heaven. God's Kingdom.

It obviously worked, because we read that *"People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."*

This was not only a few people. It was countless number of people who recognised that they needed to repent and get their hearts right with God; people that felt far from God; people that felt like they had messed up one too many times.

They confessed their sins – their shortcomings – and then they were baptised by John.

But there were other people there too. The Bible says that John *“saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, and said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”*

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were the religious leaders, scribes and teachers of John’s day. They felt like they didn’t need to repent and be baptised – certainly not by John! And John knows this and very politely tells them that their religious thinking is wrong by calling them a brood of vipers. I don’t think John made friends with them that day.

But here’s what’s interesting – John isn’t interested in how they are going to respond to the gospel of repentance he’s preaching; he isn’t interested in making people feel comfortable or make friends with them; he’s not putting on a seeker-friendly church service; rather he’s interested in fulfilling his role and preaching the message that God has given him to preach: the gospel of repentance.

And I think it’s a message that we and our nation need to hear today.

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John says: *“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

Last week David spoke about the fullness or baptism of the Holy Spirit. John here is saying that the one who comes after him, who is more powerful, whose sandals he is not worthy to carry, He will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John’s saying, He’s the one you’ve been waiting for. Not me. He’s the one who will truly baptise you. He’s the one who will separate those who follow Him from those who choose not to follow Him.

John knows his role. First, he prepares the way for Jesus; second, he preaches a gospel of repentance for the people;

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and third, he performs the baptism of Jesus.

Now here’s what’s intriguing to me. John felt comfortable preparing the way for Jesus; and he didn’t seem to mince words or struggle with preaching the gospel of repentance. But as soon as Jesus comes into his ordinary day at the Jordan River, John’s undone; and feels completely inadequate to baptise Jesus, even to be in his company.

Wow! How I relate to this. Feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness before God in my life. See, I think John knew that he himself was a great sinner, and Jesus was a great Saviour. I know that in my life too.

So John says to Jesus, I can't baptise you; you need to baptise **me!**

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But Jesus responds, *"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."*

What does this mean? Why does Jesus even need to get baptised? I mean, He is the Son of God. Well, there are various thoughts from scholars, but most likely Jesus means this in a salvation-historical sense. See, God's saving activity that has been prophesied (or foretold) throughout the Old Testament and is now being fulfilled with the inception of Jesus' ministry through Baptism, culminating in his death on the Cross.

Jesus is expressing His obedience to God's plan of salvation that has been revealed through the Scriptures.

Jesus doesn't need to repent; as He was and is sinless. So He's not being baptised for repentance; He's being baptised for the fulfilment of all righteousness.

Think about it this way: As Jesus goes into the waters of baptism, He identifies with his people in their need; he identifies with the sinful humanity (Old Adam) that He has come to save, and especially at this point of time in John's ministry He identifies Himself with the believers of Israel who come to be baptised.

Jesus in his grace, mercy and understanding of humanity, allows John to perform his water baptism. And John does so willingly once he understands why Jesus decides to be baptised.

And here is where the ordinary turns **extra-ordinary!**

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"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, 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, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

This is the Trinity in action. God the Son in Jesus is Baptised, God the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus, and God the Father delights in His Son Jesus.

And this was said for the benefit of those around Jesus; that they may know that there is something extra-special about Him.

And then at this point in time, John's role kind of finishes. He prepares the way for Jesus; preaches a gospel of repentance for the people; and performs the baptism of Jesus.

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Then lastly, he passes the ministry over to Jesus.

As we too finish this morning and the worship team comes to lead us in worshipping our extraordinary God, I don't know about you, but I really like John. I relate to him quite easily. He had a role to do in his life; he did it well; and he didn't hang around for praise or anything afterwards. Just knew that something better, something amazing, something extraordinary was taking place.

His ordinary life was used by God to do something extraordinary.

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I wonder what extraordinary things God can and will do with our ordinary lives. I wonder what extraordinary things He will continue to do with ordinary Otumoetai Baptist Church. I wonder ...

Let's pray.