

An Address by Howard Friend for Epiphany 1 – The Baptism of Christ

Genesis 1: 1-5, Mark 1: 4-11

'Because you're worth it'. Has to be one of the most successful advertising slogans ever. Mostly I suspect because we all like to be affirmed. Because I'm worth it!!

Starter for 10 – which company are we talking about here?

L' Oreal – Paris

Bonus point question: What are the ingredient costs of that £100 bottle of perfume or after-shave Father Christmas brought you this year?

£5 (or thereabouts) (The rest is advertising costs as your TV viewing in the run up to Christmas will confirm)

So maybe you're not worth quite what you thought you were. (Self doubt plagues us all doesn't it – to a greater or lesser extent)

You have to hand it to these advertising companies though don't you. They know how to spin a yarn.

(I wouldn't mind betting there's a fair few of you who in the back of your minds still think 'Guinness is good for you'.

It isn't of course, at least not in the quantities that company hope that you'll drink to keep their shareholders happy. It pickles your liver, addles your brain and - whisper it not too loudly - makes you impotent.)

But let's return to the wonderfully affirmative – 'Because you're worth it'

That's more or less what God said about Jesus at his Baptism by John. – allowing for a bit of preachers licence. (OK – allowing for a lot of preachers' licence!)

This is my Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

They are wonderful words of love and affirmation – of endorsement if you like.

And note this - because it is very important – Jesus was at the very beginning of his ministry. He hadn't yet come through the Wilderness test, let alone the ups and downs of that journey which led to the final entry into Jerusalem and it's ultimate test. This wasn't praise for a job well done – it was the heartfelt affirmation of a Father to or about a Son.

It was not - as they say - Performance related Praise

(Sorry about that - you can groan if you like – we're all of us missing the Pantomime Season aren't we?)

But it's the antithesis of that thought I want us all to appreciate and remember this morning. God's love for us is unconditional, it's unmerited, there's nothing we can do to make God love us. In fact there's quite a lot we do which makes us wonder why he does persist with us, but he just does.

He believes we're worth it.

And that affirmation gives us the confidence of self worth, a self confidence that you can see in any loved affirmed person.

Lack of self worth, of self esteem is a huge problem for many in our society, perhaps particularly the young, who are bigger users of social media.

How many 'Likes' did that post produce.

Just how much should I airbrush that photo so that somebody will like me.

It's all about Image Image Image

And we forget that God made us in his own image and loves us as we are.

That's why I love the Genesis story.

7 times in that first chapter, corresponding to the mythical days - God created something and 'saw that it was good' And on the 7th day he made man and woman in his own image. 'And God saw all that he had made – and it was very good'

Look I don't know how you're feeling at the beginning of what promises to be a very challenging year. I don't know the factors in your life that make you feel no better than that £5 of ingredients masquerading as a £100 bottle of something special,

But I do know that you are made in God's image

I do know that:

God the Father loves you, God the Son died for you and God the Holy Spirit lives in you – BECAUSE as they say

NOT – YOU'RE FIRED

BUT - YOU'RE WORTH IT