Sermon:

When first started as minister, probation studies with Rev Ralph Pritchard – who baptized me as a baby!

Baptism is an emotive issue. Early Christians kept communion away from the unbaptized, Constantine baptized just before he died so as not to sin afterwards, Reformation split over infant/adult baptism, Mormons baptize for the dead, many ministers dislike baptism when families use it as folk religion.

Jesus Baptism:

[1] Baptism is God’s idea and action

Matthew is clear: John the Baptist is motivated by God (3.3). So baptism is God’s idea, not the Church’s.

This helps us not to get too worked up about the issue.

‘Repent’ for many = ‘sorry’, but μετανοια = change of mind (much richer), and something only God can do.

This reminds us that baptism is also about God’s action, about belonging to God, about a fresh start.

It is God who encourages the change of mind, not the Church. This also helps understand the issue.

[2] Baptism is Trinitarian (ie it shows us who God is)

Another emotive issue in some churches is the Trinity. Unitarians, Muslims, and some Christians disagree.

I am currently reading ‘Nicaea & its Legacy’. At root Trinitarianism is saying God is one, God is three. This is hard to reconcile, so largely we give up trying.

One passage of importance is Matthew 3.16f, where God is shown as Father, Son and Spirit.

What it boils down to: baptism shows us what God is like. This further helps us get less emotive.

[3] Baptism is followed by discipleship

In The Screwtape Letters we see that Christians are most vulnerable immediately after making a new commitment. True even of Jesus

Immediately after his baptism JC is tempted (Matthew, Mark & Luke), and then begins his ministry.

The temptations (which we look at in Lent) take place when Jesus is working out the nature of his ministry.

Thus baptism is not just a ceremony, but also opening a door to new discipleship.

Discipleship can be within the church and/or the community; individual or with others. What is yours?

Baptism – is about God’s activity, tells us what God is like, and urges a response of renewed discipleship.