

Baptism Testimonies - Easter Sunday - 17th April 2022

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Date: 17 April 2022

[0 : 00] Well, I've heard the word excited quite a few times today. People have come here excited for a very special reason. And we want to join in that excitement with them.

And one thing that I always think about at these times is going right back to the Easter story when the disciples were excited when they met their Lord after he'd been risen. And couldn't wait to tell their friends about what they'd seen. And I think it's important at a time like this that those who are being baptised or renewing their baptism vows get the chance to, either through me or their own testimony, just to say a few words about their journey or why they're here today.

And it's never such a nerve-wracking thing. It's nerve-wracking standing here for me, let alone people who are going to go in that water over there. So they're excited, but I know some of them are nervous as well.

I don't want anybody to be afraid because this is a place of comfort, a place where you're amongst friends and we're all rooting for you, all of you.

[1 : 16] So without further ado, I'm just going to say a few words about Josie, first of all. Friend Josie. I've known Josie a very, very long time since a girl.

And Josie has been coming along to the drop-in. It's been great to see her at drop-in. And just lately, drop-in has been followed by a service, which has been even better.

Yeah, the service first, drop-in is afterwards. And so they've been coming into this part and really getting into the service in a great way. And Joseph said that she loves the Mondays.

Is that right? She can't exactly put into words why she wants to be baptised, but she knows it's got to happen. She wants to do that. And I can associate with that, Josie, because I had this exactly the same.

And all I knew was that I've got to do it. And your journey starts here. And no matter if you don't know all the ins and outs, it's wonderful that you want to take this step.

[2 : 21] So I'd like you to give Josie a big round of applause. Thank you. It's fantastic.

It does my heart good, I tell you. It's brilliant. Now, Sylvia, who's sitting behind there. Wave, Sylvia. She's there. Yes. And she's been coming to church for a while.

And she wants to be baptised because she's not sure whether she's been baptised or not. Dear Sylvia, this is... So it's going to be her first time. And she shared how important the worship song is. Here I am to worship. Is that right? It's especially good for you. And the lines that are important for you are, here I am to worship. Here I am to bow down.

Here I am to say that you're my God. And I think that is absolutely amazing. God's in the room.

[3 : 29] So really, this is just a testament of your faith in him. You know, sometimes we think to worship we have to sing.

And worship songs are so important because they tell our stories in lots of ways. But we don't always have to sing. We just have to know. We just have to... We can worship him in any form. Just by being in his presence. So Sylvia, we're looking forward to... She's not going under the water. She's chosen to be baptised in a traditional way that Ruth's going to do.

From the font. So that'll be happening a bit later. So give Sylvia a big round of applause. Right. Can I call out Ruth? Are you coming together, Ruth and Andy? I've got this one. So would you like to say your few? Oh, she's got a few. Oh, yeah. You've got a lot. I'm afraid I think I've stolen Neil's time and probably my fiancé Andy's time as well.

[4 : 34] But I'm going to get on with it. A little under 40 years ago, Jesus bounded into my life on a Devon beach with a group called the United Beach Missions, illuminating the gospel to teens on vacation.

It was the beginning for me of a joyful and intense about four years as a Christian here within the old walls of St. John's Church.

When I was 18, a number of confusions, emotional quandaries and cynicism, like weeds, choked my faith.

And once I reached university, I didn't feel able to acknowledge God in my heart or in my life at all. This wilderness carried on for about 26 years.

And although my life's adventures presented some fulfillment and happiness, I was always aware that my spirit was unsettled. Five or so years ago, when my daughter was nearly four, Amelia, the dearest woman in my life, my beautiful mum, Wendy, became life-threateningly sick with lymphoma.

[6 : 01] Mum and the whole family were shaken with fear and uncertainty. And mum began a gruelling six months of chemotherapy, which was the toughest thing I've ever seen anyone I'm close to have to go through.

At this time, I was thankfully led to a wonderful single parents group in Burntwood called Horizon, created and led by the wonderful Avril.

As soon as I met Avril, I knew that I had met her for reasons other than the group, which in itself was an endless source of support, community and friendship.

Avril is a Christian and her love of God lights her up and in turn ignited the spirit in me. I went along with her and her family to Beacon Church, where I attended for a few years, gleaning hope, comfort and strength during mum's illness.

The Almighty blessed the incredible cancer specialists at Burton Hospital and their powerful concoction destroyed the tumours in mum's lymph nodes.

[7 : 09] And I am so grateful to have her here today. I visited St John's on and off for a year or so, trying to introduce my daughter Amelia to Sunday stars here.

Sadly, because of her sensory difficulties, it wasn't for her. And being alone in the congregation, however welcoming and inspiring each service was, I felt too emotional to continue.

It was October 2020 when God sent me Andy, excuse me, give myself a thick lip. My soul mate, my best friend and the love of my life.

He saw in me and heard my connection with God. We listened together to Matt's services during lockdown and he was excited to be by my side at church when the world opened up after COVID restrictions.

So, here I am, grateful to be here with you all, celebrating new beginnings, new and old friendships, and asking God to fill me with all the love, strength and inspiration I need to move forward.

[8 : 25] Thank you very much. God bless. Very good. Thank you. Very good. Thank you. Thank you. Excellent. Thank you. Excellent. That was absolutely amazing.

Thank you. I actually left you something to say. I can't follow that. I'm not going to. So, it's just a few thank yous, really.

First and foremost, Neil, Helen, Ruth and James for helping us prepare for this for the last four, five, six weeks. And the only other one is Ruth, who my soul mate and I couldn't do this without her.

So, that's all I've got to say. That's absolutely fine. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Right.

Leslie, where is she? Come on, Leslie. I think you ought to give Leslie a round of applause before she comes up to give her a bit of... You all right?

[9 : 43] I woke up at five o'clock this morning. And the Lord decided this is what I was going to do. My faith began when I was three, when I went to church with my granddad.

And he would give me a prayer card to look at during the service. And over time, he would tell me about Jesus and his life. As I approached the age to make my holy communion, I was taught by two lovely nuns who were bewildered by my account and asking of constant questions.

They used to say to me, other boys and girls don't do this. They just accept. I was never completely at ease and felt that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit were not an easy access.

And the question stayed unanswered. In the very early 70s, I went to the library doing my homework. And I started reading about other faiths.

And some of the questions were starting to be answered. The Osmonds landed. And I found the Church of Jesus Christ of Last Day Saints, which I had a church just not far from where I lived.

[11:05] And over the next four years, I began to have a personal relationship with my Heavenly Father, my Saviour Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. My Saviour Jesus Christ, oh sorry, no, the Holy Scriptures revealed so much to me until one day I was called to the office after I'd had a bit of a crisis.

And they told me they prayed to Jesus who said, I was a sinner and I was not wanted because I was tainted.

I don't know where I found the voice or the courage to say to them that my Lord and my Saviour died on the cross for me.

And if I went to him remorseful and with true repentance, my sin would be taken. For the next 13 years, it was just the four of us.

My Heavenly Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and me. With a young family, I came to St. John's in the old church and my children went to Sunday school in the church rooms that we had around the corner.

[12:17] And I belonged to the church community and loved the Holy Trinity and my faith grew. Until again, a personal crisis happened. Colin cancelled me and my husband.

Unfortunately, I did feel let down and I didn't come back. Until about 2013, my daughter's bands were being read.

So I went to church to listen to them. And I stayed at that church for a while. But there was no spirit. I couldn't feel anything. And the Lord kept saying to me, Leslie, you know where I want you.

You need to go back. So eventually, Irene dragged me back. And you know that story. But one Sunday, as I always used to sit at the back of the church, Steve Taylor came and sat next to me.

And he said, I know you. And I said, yes, you do. And we had a chat and he went, oh, scouse. And I went, yes.

[13:23] Had a bit more of a chat and he put his hand on my arm as he went to leave me. And he just said, welcome home. St. John's is a very special place where we can come to pray, where we can come to praise, where we learn about our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

And this place is a hug. As soon as you walk into the building, it embraces you. You feel everything. The Lord knows I've had another crisis.

And for me to be standing here now, believe you me, I'm not standing. He is holding. So I just want to end by saying how much I love my Heavenly Father, who knows everything about me.

My Saviour, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, who guides me. And as it is a Resurrection Sunday. Hallelujah.

He is risen. Hallelujah. Well done. Well done. Well done. Excellent. Thank you. Superb.

[14:42] Well done. Thank you for that. Thank you. Thank you. Helen. I think Ruth. Yeah, give him a clap. Right.

So are you going to go first? I think Julia. Oh, Julia. Okay. So what has brought me to be baptised today was a question I needed to think about. It has been a question I have pondered on greatly over the past few weeks, more so the past few days, with both good and hard reflections.

I am a somewhat stubborn, independent person who has been driven to do things my own way in a bid to protect myself from being hurt. This has, along the way, led to drinking, self-harming, and a very insular life, fraught with depression and anxiety from the age of 11.

I was kicked out of my home at 13 to live with my dad, God bless him, pregnant at 17, living in a bedsit and onto a one-bedroom flat. The road from childhood, or the lack of it, has been challenging, particularly all the way up to adulthood.

However, when I look back, I am not angry and I am not sad. I can see Jesus in every step of the way. He has always had my back, even when I have felt alone, have done stupid things, and have rejected his help.

[16:04] So here I am today, with what I would call an angel sent from God in my Auntie Judith. She stepped up and chose to be my mum over the past few years, and I love her dearly.

And she has kept me in faith with a gentle hand along the way. I have my husband-to-be that, quite frankly, deserves a medal living with me, because I am not the easiest to live with.

And above all, after I spoke to Ruth the other day about issues of honouring your mother and father, which is hard when you don't love your actual own mother, and I have wrestled with it.

But as Ruth pointed out, above all, I have honoured her by having my own daughters, who I love dearly, and who love me and grandchildren.

And today, that is me putting my anger and my hurt to peace. And it is okay, I realise. I don't understand my mum's motives, but that's okay, because I am here today, and I am a good mum, I am a good friend, and I try desperately to be a good partner, but I don't always get it right.

[17:26] So, above all, I have my Father Jesus, who no matter what I have done, no matter what things I have said, in temper and in anger, loves me, for me, with our airs and graces, because I just don't have those, I'm sorry.

And despite all my failings today, I want to give everything that I have to Jesus in thanks, and that's why I want to be baptised today.

Oh, wow. Well done.

That was very well done. Very proud of you. It's not easy, is it, when you bare your soul. But God sees you through Jesus.

God sees Jesus. When he sees you, he sees Jesus. Ironically, at five past one, this morning, I was, I couldn't sleep, I've told Ruth I was going to cancel today, because I didn't, I can't speak eloquently like others, and I can't put it into words in the Bible ways.

[18:35] No, in my head, in my head. And ironically, I woke up to a text at five past one, which is exactly when I was awake this morning, off my auntie, telling me that God has told her to tell me that I am his greatest possession, and it is exactly the time we were both awake.

Wow. So, amen. Yeah. Great. Fantastic. Yeah. Hello, Ava. Heather? Hello. You go and stand a bit. That's it. Rocket baby, she said. I haven't written anything down, so please bear with me. Right. I don't know where to start.

Okay, so, for the last few months, I've really, really struggled with my mental health. And had it not been for the love of the people at this church, I don't think I'd be here now. So I just want to say today, thanks, Jesus.

Oh, dear. That's okay. That's okay. That's okay. That's okay. That's okay. But yeah, if it wasn't for the love of the people at this church and knowing that God loves me. Right. But I'm here, and I'm here today to say that Jesus is my Lord.

[19:41] And no matter how unperfect I am and how many times I get things wrong and how many times I run away from God, I know he's got my back. So I'm here. Thank you. Excellent.

Excellent. Well done. Well done. Well done. Well done. Well done. God's timing is perfect.

Absolutely perfect. And last week on the way here to church, I really felt I've got to say to Matt, Matt, you've got people that are being baptized, but they're somebody that needs to do it.

And they haven't put the name forward. And I think Leslie was sitting next to you as well last week, and she said, you've got to do this. And on my way out, Matt said, you're right, Jane.

He said, I did ask people, and Helen's going to do it. So, but he said, she thinks she's going to do it. She's going to text me. She might do it. She might not. So the next day, we went to the park with the boys, which we never go to the park with the boys.

[20:46] We don't have them a lot, do we, the boys. Our grandchildren, that is. And who was in the park? Helen. Great. You're going to be baptized on Sunday, aren't you?

Am I? Yes, you are. So God knows, doesn't he? He does. Absolutely.