

Mucky Water!

2 Kings 5^{1-3,7-15}; Psalm 111; 2 Timothy 2⁸⁻¹⁵; Luke 17¹¹⁻¹⁹

*Are not Arbana and Pharphar, the rivers of Jordan, better than all the waters of Israel?
[2 Kings 5¹²]*

There is a tradition that, when you are ordained in the Church of England, you (if you are wearing a 39 button cassock to represent the 39 Articles of Christian Religion from the Book of Common Prayer 1662) leave undone those buttons corresponding to the articles you do not agree with.

I confess that I left undone the 27th button - the Article entitle *Of Baptism*. I did this because of the statement of Baptismal Regeneration - the belief that Original Sin is removed by sprinkling water on the head of some unsuspecting infant.

- ✦ It isn't because I don't believe in original sin - that notion that we are all tainted by a predisposition to evil. If you need evidence just think about babies - they learn to be the most manipulative creatures on earth, crying to be held, fed, or whatever. Part of my rejection of Article 27 is that there is no evidence that babies are any different after their baptism than before it!
- ✦ It isn't because I don't believe that God can, through his gift of grace, change anyone - even babies.
- ✦ It is because baptism on its own has limited effect. I have been in the Church for long enough to see those who want the spectacle and the party come and go and, just like the 10 lepers from the Gospel today, the smallest fraction of them follow up what they promise or express their gratitude to God.

I think you all know by now that my favourite part of the Baptism service is the Chrismation and the words, *Christ claims you for his own!* The Covenant theology here is profound.

So, can we justify baptising babies?

The answer to that comes in the story we hear of Naaman.

- ✦ He had leprosy and it was his Israeli servant girl who pointed him to the prophet, Naaman, as most chaps would do, decides to go to the top - in this instance the King, who was petrified by the visit of this powerful man.
- ✦ When he is sent to the prophet Elisha, he couldn't be bothered to come down and just sent a message - go and wash 7 times in the Jordan. The great man didn't fancy this foreign sewer and is angry. Only his wise advisors point out that if something brave or daring had been demanded the General would have done it - and so he exercises faith and is healed.
- ✦ The prophet wants no reward - the response of faith is enough for him.

Nothing brave is demanded today - except that simple act of faith from the people of God, parents and godparents of trusting Riley to God. It is this public and deliberate inclusion of God, of agreeing to work and pray, that will in the end bear fruit.

Riley will be as she ever was, if a little wet on the head, and will continue to wind mum and dad and anyone else round her finger: but as she comes to know God and sees what it is to be a Christian from those around her, she will come to make that faith her own.

So, too, many of us are tempted to Naaman's error - of wanting our encounter with God to be more to our taste: more cerebral; more challenging; more flamboyant. Yet it is as simple and as tasteless as dipping in the Jordan to come to God: of repentance; of faith in God made known to us in Jesus; and a life committed to living as a Christian.

Forgive me, but Kierchegaard's Ducks are to have an outing again!