

Counting In!

[Numbers 11^{4-6,10-16,24-29}; Psalm 19^{7-end};] James 5^{13-end}; Mark 9^{13-end}

*Whoever is not against us is for us
[Mark 9⁴⁰]*

I don't know why any of you are here - or indeed why any parents ask for their children to be baptised. What I do know is that God knows and blesses you for even the smallest step towards him.

Sometimes we could be forgiven for thinking that faith is difficult (the last few chapters of Mark have been uncompromising in calling for sacrificial discipleship) - but Mark now records Jesus being much more generous. The passage begins with the disciples trying to decide who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the followers and Jesus is quite clear that if you are in on the ground floor you are in: **whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose their reward.**

When I was growing up I always thought it odd when we visited my great-aunt Maggie that, when we ate, they sat at a table on one side of the room and we at a table at the other eating precisely the same thing at the same time. This was because they were members of the Exclusive Brethren and their religion didn't allow them to have a meal with us!

Beware that we don't put more conditions on God's love than he does!

Jesus goes further - **if you put a stumbling block before these little ones** (people young in the faith not necessarily young in years) **who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.**

You don't have to pass any exams to be baptised - you simply have to have faith!

Parents and godparents aren't expected to know the difference between baptismal regeneration in the theology of the Book of Common Prayer based on the understanding of original sin as taught by Augustine in the 3rd century, nor the covenant theology of Common Worship!

Faith trusts God for the past, the present and the future!

Then Jesus is at his comic best, telling us about how we should live as Christians and assuring us that the baptism into which we are baptised is indelible:

We have the hyperbole of amputating all the bits that cause us to misbehave! What a bunch we would be - mute, blind, immobile and sterile - if we took this literally! Yet we need to take it seriously: the things that work against the best that God has for us we need to do something about!

Then unsalted salt - when is sodium chloride not sodium chloride? What matters is God's judgement of us - he knows genuine faith and genuine action. He knows we can't change ourselves which is why Jesus came and in his life, his death, his resurrection and in his being showed us how much God loves us.

I may not know why you are here or what you expect from being here - but God knows. If you honestly move towards him then he embraces you and will not let you go!