

Easter Day Baptism

Last year I watched a film called *First Man*. The film was the story of Neil Armstrong. Neil Armstrong will always be remembered as the first man to step foot on the moon.

It is, in fact, an extraordinary story. It is an extraordinary story because it is the story of man's quest to fly to the moon and to walk on it, but it is also an extraordinary story in many other ways.

It is the story of the race between nations to be the first to achieve the seemingly impossible. It is the story of engineers desperately trying to figure out how to build a craft capable of leaving and then re-entering the earth's atmosphere. It is the story of mathematicians understanding angles of flight and orbit and thrust and landing. It is the story of the collective power of the brightest and most capable minds coming together to find an answer.

It is the story of set-backs and tragedy. It is the story of perseverance and the absolute determination not to give up on the goal. It is the story of vast expense to realise a dream and desire. It is the story of competing agendas and opposing views. It is the story of unstinting bravery in the face of limited odds and personal loss.

It is the story of loved ones hoping, waiting, fearing, wondering, longing. It is the story of ultimate triumph. It is the story that not only demonstrates the power of possibility, but opened a door to greater and expanded possibility. It is the story of an anticipated future. But above all, it is the story of one man: Neil Armstrong.

Neil Armstrong: the first man to ever walk on the surface of the moon!

It turns out that Neil Armstrong was not the invincible astronaut we might imagine him to be. He was, in truth, a troubled man. And he was never meant to be the first man! That he was is a result of tragedy and great personal loss:

On 26th January 1967, Gus Grissom, Ed White and Roger Chaffee lost their lives in a fire in the Apollo 1 Command Module. They weren't in space – the tragedy happened in a pre-flight test at Cape Canaveral. They were to be the first crew on a manned Apollo orbit of the earth. Launch date was due on 21st February 1967. They were practising the launch procedure – but in an unfuelled launch pad! Probably due to a spark from a short-circuit somewhere in the command module, a fire broke out in the capsule where the men were. It was partly due to the design of the module, and partly due to the oxygen rich air, the fire spread devastatingly quickly and all three men died!

So Neil Armstrong became the first man to leave the earth and set foot on the moon!

It got me thinking...First man!

It got me thinking of another first man. It got me thinking of another first man – not one who left the earth and then came back, but of another first man who came to the earth... and then left. Another first man who came to this earth and when he left opened up a whole new world of possibility.

One of the most extraordinary parts of the story of the film First Man, is the truth that Neil Armstrong knew, had seen and experienced the absolute nature of the risk he was about to take. He had witnessed, first hand, the deep loss of friends and colleagues. In fact, he knew the price others had paid when they had taken the same risks he would take. He knew that the only reason he would perhaps become the first man was because of the risk others had already taken.

And yet...And yet...He took the risk!

So great is the Father's love for you, that Jesus took the risk. It is true that it was not God's original intention or desire for Jesus to be the first man, but the story of the bible tells us of the tragedy of sin – the pride that separates us from God.

The story of the bible tells us of just how hard God worked to win his people back. He chose Abraham, Israel, the prophets. He wooed his people, helped them, sustained them, provided for them, rescued them, led them and guided them. He took risk after risk after risk, hoping, waiting, longing, inviting,

drawing.... And yet, time and time and time again his people rejected Him. But, because he loves and loves and loves and loves, he never gave up, never abandoned, he never rejected those He created. And, when his people still chose to live their own way, God took the greatest risk of all. He let Jesus leave the glory of heaven and become the first man...the first man to come from the heavens and dwell on the earth.

Jesus, fully aware of the risk, chose to leave the glory of the heavens and become the first man! He took that risk because he knew the way for you and I to know and experience God's great and magnificent love, was through the cross.

It is an extraordinary story.

It is the story of passionate desire, of magnificent love, of pain and tragedy, of heartache and feeling abandoned. It is the story of personal pain and human agony. But it is too, the story of ultimate triumph and the opening up of new and wonderful possibility.

What is wonderful about baptism is that it opens up wonderful new possibilities...with God! Baptism is our response to the truth about Jesus: first man. It is a response to all that he has done and all that he can do. It is a response to Jesus: first man, saying – I was living without acknowledging the truth about God, but now I choose to follow Him. It is a response to Jesus, first man, to say – I choose now to live in the possibilities of life with God.

What is particularly lovely about these baptisms today is that it reminds us that it is never too late to live in the truth of possibility with God.

It does involve risk though!

Baptism is a bit of a risk isn't it? From the very practical: will the water be cold? What will others think? What if I don't feel any different? To the wondering about how life might be: will I feel different? What does it really mean to follow God? What if I get it wrong and continue to make mistakes?

Pam and Jean, God has a promise for people like you who take the risk: "I will never leave you or forsake you."

God delights when we have the courage to take the risk. He does not promise that life will be easy, or pain free, or will turn out as we would like. But he does promise to be with us in and through everything.

And now you open yourself up to a world of possibilities with God himself!

Friends, it seems to me that to take the risk of following God opens us to the possibility that only He can bring. Which begs the question: How are you doing? How are you doing following God?

Perhaps you face choices that in some way involve risk:

- To give up something you are holding onto tightly
- To engage in something you have so far resisted
- To follow in a new and different direction
- To choose the way of forgiveness
- To leave behind what you know to be wrong
- To trust God with your past
- To trust God with your future

God loves you because he loves you because he loves you because he loves you.... Sometimes the only way to know and experience that love is to take the risk.

So: how about you?

That's what Pam and Jean have done today. Perhaps they serve as an example to you today and...maybe the risk you know is for you to take, is to do what they have done and choose to be baptised!

Pam and Jean, may God bless you abundantly today and in the days to come.