

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

5 July 2020

To Do or Not To Do? That is indeed the question! Without wisdom we will always get it wrong. Without wisdom the great swing-o-meter of life continues, backwards and forwards, from the extremes of deprivation at one end to excess at the other. The compass loses its orientation, the map becomes blurred and the signposts point in wrong directions. Paul talks about this disorientation in Romans 7:15-25a, and the cause of the problem he puts down to 'sin living in me' and 'my sinful nature'. The consequence of sin is of course settled at the cross; but living with sin in the present is an ongoing challenge, another battle. 'For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?' (vs 22-24) This is a powerful question, and a relevant question for each one of us. The answer is of course Jesus, who comes as our rescuer, our Saviour. But how? Through the Cross and Resurrection, yes, disarming the power of sin and death; but day by day, moment by moment, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Wisdom of God, living within us—cleansing, taming, and re-orientating us in the direction of God. Without wisdom we will always get it wrong, but with wisdom we can thrive.

To Dance and to Mourn. There is of course a right time for most things. John's fasting and baptising prepared the ground for the ministry of Jesus to follow—a ministry driven towards freedom from slavery to sin and law, characterised by celebration, and bringing to birth life in all its fullness. The spirit of this age is confusion, not knowing how to respond. "We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn." It was of course customary at that time to join in when a bridal procession or a funeral cortege passed by. There is a time to rejoice and a time to mourn, a time to feast and a time to fast. The Wisdom Spirit of God guides us to that place where we can know the difference, where we live lives that are balanced in harmony in Christ. (Romans 12:15)

SUGGESTED SONG

Be Thou My Vision
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9cuRc1RMbE>

BLESSING

Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Romans 7:25)

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and forever. Amen.

<https://rydebaptist.xyz>

Dear Friends,

Last week we considered what the church might be like as a result of all the changes that will follow in the wake of Covid-19, if and how we might make our building a more Covid-19 safe environment in the future. The Deacons will be giving this matter some more thought and prayer this week. For today, though, a complete change of subject and tone. From your own reading of the Bible you will have noticed that there are passages of Scripture that preachers often find difficult to preach on, and usually avoid. Sometimes that stretches to whole books, and the Song of Solomon is probably high up on that list.

I can remember how as young lads in church we giggled our way through readings from the Song of Solomon. In more recent years I attended a friend's wedding where during the service the bride and groom read long sections from the book to each other, whilst the congregation tried hard to stifle their mirth with pained expressions on their faces and with tears rolling down their cheeks. We are not quite sure how to deal with this book, which is in fact an extended erotic love poem—a duet between the lover and the beloved—and

wonder how it came to be in the Bible. The early church got around it by taking it to be an allegory describing the relationship between Christ and the church, between the groom and his bride. Of course this doesn't really work and ends up with even more confusion.

It strikes me that it is best to take the Song of Solomon at face value as a celebration of the fact that God has created the whole of our humanity, our sexuality, our relationships, which extends to the very core of our identity as people made in God's image. Yes, the picture conjured up by gazelles leaping and bounding across the landscape can be amusing, but anyone familiar with Middle Eastern poetry (such as that of Kahlil Gibran writing in the early 20th Century) will be comfortable with this world adorned with pomegranates, figs and doves. In the pursuit of purity we often stray too far into the world of puritanism. It has often occurred to me that we badly serve both our worship and our mission when we miss out the awkward passages—the gruesome and the sexy—from our regular use of the Bible, the whole counsel of God. Such things might just grab the attention of the next generations, and point to a more relaxed, healthy and attractive faith.

Our Zoom Sunday Morning Fellowship Meeting is at 10.30am and our Monday Prayer Meeting at 7.00pm. If you are able to join us, you will be welcome. If you are reading this sheet on your computer or device you can also click on the readings and songs. There are other helpful links at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

PRAY FOR RYDE 2020

Launched last Wednesday, the themes for prayer are being published daily. Go to prayforryde.org for more information, videos and the link to the daily 7pm Zoom prayer meeting. For those who cannot access the website, here are last week's themes: 1 July, Introduction; 2 July, Nurses & Healthworkers; 3 July, Community Carers; 4 July, Family Carers. We will update the list here each week until 23 September.

CALL TO WORSHIP

'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' (Matthew 11:28-30)

BIBLE READINGS

[Song of Solomon 2:8-13](#)

[Matthew 11:16-19,25-30](#)

[Romans 7:15-25a](#)

SUGGESTED SONGS

Lord I Lift Your Name On High
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVYZcCAwH5Q>

Waiting Here For You
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3O6JIAKENk8>

PRAYER

Lord God our Loving Heavenly Father, we come before you today grateful that you have brought us to life, and that through Jesus you have given us the precious gift of life in all its fullness. We confess that we haven't always used that gift in the best way, and that sometimes we have abused it or taken it for granted. Thank you for our humanity, and that through the life and love of Jesus, we have a God who knows and understands what it is like to live as people on this planet, with all the opportunities and temptations laid out before us. Thank you that, when we stray from following your will and your way, you call us back into your fold, welcoming us home with forgiveness and grace. Thank you that the life you call us to live is richer and more blessed than we could ever imagine, and the things you call us to do are easier and more possible than ever we might fear. Thank you for your Holy Spirit, inspiring, guiding and leading us all the way. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Saviour and Friend. Amen.

TO PONDER

Life can be very confusing when we are growing up, knowing what is right and what is wrong. The church hasn't always made this any easier. Can you think of things you may have been told were wrong which you have since discovered otherwise; or things that were permissible that you have since discovered not? You may remember the scene from the film *Chariots of Fire*, where Eric Liddell chastises a young lad for kicking a football on the Lord's Day, and how he will not himself compete in an Olympic race on the 'sabbath'. Many of us may continue to regret the extended of laws to enable the opening of shops and sports fixtures on a Sunday. To what extent has the church either promoted or prevented people from experiencing life in all its fullness?

SUGGESTED SONGS

Purity My Heart
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lvXA0yRDwY>

Your Grace Is Enough
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kvw6SkZ4cGI>

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

Jesus and John. It is fascinating looking at the relationship between Jesus and his cousin John the baptiser. In the gospels they are described as cousins, as kinsmen—and Luke describes at length

the prenatal meeting between their mothers. (Luke 1:39-45) John goes on to fulfil his role as the 'forerunner' pointing to Jesus as the one who is to come, who he baptises in the river Jordan. 'Behold the lamb of God', says John of Jesus. So, it is especially fascinating to see how Jesus sees their relationship in Matthew 11:18-19. John's ethics were very strict, maybe influenced by the Essenes or another Jewish sect. Regular fasting and physical privation was an important part of his ascetic regime. You will remember when John's disciples visited Jesus to discover why he didn't fast or instruct his disciples to fast! (Matthew 9:14-17) By chapter 11 John is in prison and sends his disciples to check that Jesus is the one he thought he was because his behaviour and lifestyle is so very different. While the bridegroom is still present, the party continues. Whether the criticism comes from outside or within, you cannot win. John was cast as a demon for his puritanical ways; whilst the one whose celebration of life foreshadows the feast of God's kingdom (Psalm 23) is condemned as 'a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' No, you cannot win. Other than the fact that, as Jesus says, 'wisdom is proved right by her deeds.' Or, as Jesus says elsewhere, you can tell the difference between a good and a bad tree by the fruit that the tree bears. (Matthew 7:15-20). So it is with the way we live our lives. But what are we to do?