

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

17 January 2021

Dear Friends,

The word Zoom has become a familiar and often used word for most of us for nearly a year now. Before, it was probably most used by photographers or other camera operators to refer to zooming or focusing in on a subject from a distance. Either that or by lovers of fast cars who take great delight in putting their foot down to zoom off into the distance. Now, of course, Zoom refers to the fastest growing, most flexible and globally popular, online video conferencing tool that has meant that all of us with computers, and everyone with a telephone, can connect together in ways previously unimagined. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that during this Covid-19 pandemic Zoom has been a lifesaver, particularly for those of us in smaller churches.

Larger churches, with teams of gifted people and budgets to match, are able to film, edit and upload slick videos to YouTube or Facebook. This takes time, money, gifts and resources our deficit budget will not permit. Although these platforms allow recorded services to be viewed at any time, the downside is that they inevitably lack immediacy and interactivity, and anything of a personal nature must be left out. Although the recordings are often of a very high quality, the danger is that viewers become an audience rather than a congregation of participants. What is engaging, educating and inspiring, can also become entertainment rather than help grow, develop and nurture living relationships between worshippers and God.

We are so grateful to God for the way that we have been able to use the technology available to us, accessible to those who are willing to use it, and within our present levels of gifts, resources and budget. We have been able to use it for Sunday worship services, Monday prayer meetings, deacons' and church members' meetings, pastoral conversations, more informal gatherings, training, administration, for Girl's Brigade, and in so many other ways too. Personally we have been able to maintain contact with our loved ones, our families and our friends.

Indications from churches, denominations, and other parts of society, in this country and around the world, are that video conferencing such as Zoom is here to stay and will be an important part of our social landscape for many years to come. Some of us may have been waiting, or resisting coming on board, for nearly a year, hoping that things will get back to 'normal'. For most of us, Zoom has become the new normal, and the danger is that some will be left out or have opted out at a time when much of the world has moved on. There are so many benefits of being connected in this way, the greatest of which is not being so isolated, lonely or out of touch than we otherwise might be.

Communication is at the heart of God's Word for us today. Are we listening to God's voice calling to us? Are we able to hear God, or might we have cut off the channels of communication in some way? God knows us, and sees us, and his longing is that we stay in close touch with Him.

Zoom in the safest way for most people to meet at this time and will continue to be the main way that we will be able to meet for some while yet. Our weekly Zoom Sunday Service is at 10.30am today, and our Zoom Prayer Meeting is at 7pm on Monday. The Zoom links will be sent to those who have signed up to receive them. If you'd like us to send you the links, please let us know. If you are reading this sheet on your computer or device you can click on the the readings and songs. There is more information on our website at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 139:1-18](#)

[1 Samuel 3:1-10](#)

[John 1:43-51](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely...Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. [Psalm 139:1-4,6]

SONGS

[Come Now Is The Time To Worship](#)

[Here I Am To Worship \(Light Of The World\)](#)

FOR REFLECTION

Make yourself aware of your present surroundings, and think about how God is with you right where you are. What things are helpful, and what things are a distraction, in being able to relate with God in prayer, in praise and in worship, and what changes might you need to make?

PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for the gift of this new week. We pray for those things that are heavy on our hearts and minds. We pray for those suffering most from Covid, patients and those taking care of them. We pray for the swift and safe administration of the vaccine, grateful for its development and arrival at record speed. We pray for our hospital at St Mary's, under pressure at this time, for all staff and patients, including the chaplaincy team. We pray for those in education, and the particular pressures they face. We pray for our own country and the nations of this world. We pray for a safe peaceful inauguration of the next President and Vice President of the United States. We place these and other things in your hands. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

"We give you thanks, holy Father, for your holy name, which you planted in our hearts; and for the knowledge, faith and immortality which you sent us through Jesus Christ, your child.

"You created everything, sovereign Lord, for the glory of your name. You gave food and drink to men for their enjoyment, and as a cause of thanksgiving. And to us you have given spiritual food and spiritual drink, bestowing on us the promise of eternal life. Above all we thank you for the power of your love.

"Deliver your Church, Lord, from all evil and teach it to love you perfectly. You have made it holy. Build it up from the four winds and gather it into the kingdom for which you have destined it."

[from The Didache, 1st or 2nd century]

SONGS

[Grace Greater Than Our Sin](#)

[I Need Thee Every Hour](#)

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

Introduction. Do you remember where you were when Jesus first spotted you, and then called you to follow him as one of his disciples? I remember one occasion when I was walking along the shoreline of the Bristol Channel in North Somerset - not quite as dramatic as the by the Sea of Galilee, but significant for me. This week and next week our Bible readings tell the stories of the calling of some of Jesus' first disciples. We immediately notice in John's Gospel that he tells these stories in a different way to the other Gospels; John is less concerned with the precise chronological order or the exact geographic locations of some of the events, although there are intriguing details given for others. Such is the case of the calling of Philip and Nathanael. John tells us that Andrew had been one of John the Baptist's followers, who then approached his brother Simon (renamed Cephas/Rock/Peter) about following Jesus. Philip, who like Andrew and Peter came from Bethsaida on the north shore of Galilee, is likewise invited by Jesus to 'Follow me', and he also goes off to find Nathanael. Jesus calls one, then in response they go on to call another. It is how mission works, and how it worked right from the start. Jesus speaks directly, and he speaks through his disciples, in order to call others to him. It is our job too!

Where were you when God called you?

The experience of God calling the young Samuel was so memorable that he told others the story, and it was told and retold countless times down the generations before finally being written down. He was in bed, not an uncommon location for encounters with God. It would have stuck out in his memory all the more because, as we are clearly told at the start of the

chapter, "In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions." God was calling Samuel to be his prophet, starting with an important revelation about Eli and his sons that they had not previously fully heard or understood, as they stood in judgement before God. Eli knew it was the Lord calling the young lad, and after the third call Samuel answered clearly, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.' It wasn't a pleasant task that Samuel was given, but he conducted it faithfully, and his ministry flourished, culminating in the secret anointing of the shepherd boy David who would later be King. Samuel heard God's call and responded. When and where has God called us, and what has been our response?

God sees us and calls us where we are.

Many of us have either heard said or used words that go something like this: 'Be careful what you do or say because God can see every word and deed. He even knows your thoughts.' The 'I'm watching you' technique is often used when training young children. At its worst 'God sees everything you are doing' can be used as a form of control or abuse of power, as if God was some sort of divine CCTV. In reality God is gracious and does give us a huge amount of latitude to either fail or to succeed. Yet it is also true that God does watch over us, to guard and protect us, to nurture and direct us, to rebuke us and to love us, just not in the controlling ways that we might exercise that power. The words of Psalm 139 are not meant to be sinister, like the shadow of an oppressive overlord. Rather they convey the reality of the close relationship between God and us, just because he is the loving creator and we are his creatures. God can see and speak to us, and he does call out to us, just where we happen to be at the time. God's

constant presence is not intended to be frightening but to be reassuring. God protects us whether we are up and about or asleep in bed. This reflection and meditation on the proximity of God with us, fulfilled of course in his Son Jesus who is literally Emmanuel (God with us), climaxes in some of the most beautiful descriptions of a human relationship with God: 'I praise you that I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well...How precious to me are your thoughts, God!' So why are we so slow to hear and to respond to God's loving call when he is so very near?

Where is your fig tree? I get to see a fig tree every Saturday afternoon as I do my rounds delivering these sheets to a few friends without email. At the moment it is dormant, although there are small buds that are awaiting the first signs of Spring before bursting into new life. Jesus had seen Nathanael under a fig tree some time before Philip had told him about Jesus of Nazareth being the one who had come to fulfil the promises in the Law and the Prophets, the Messiah. Nathanael's sceptical 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' is understandable given the nature of the Roman occupation and mixed population in the hill country around Nazareth, compared to the very strict Jewish communities found around the Sea of Galilee, such as at Bethsaida, Capernaum, and Magdala. Philip's encouragement is appropriate: 'Come and see!' Jesus not only appreciates Nathanael's honesty, but comments on it. He has observed him, seen his reactions, and is impressed. To question, to want evidence and experience, to think and to reflect seriously before taking a step of faith, is not criticised at all. Just so long as it doesn't lead to procrastination and the step of faith is taken.

The fruit of the fig tree is figs. This might sound really obvious, but often we don't get it. We settle for the tree, when there is so much more to come. We can focus on the structures, the buildings, the institutions of church, when the important thing is the fruitful life that God grows around it. Nathanael's confession of faith, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel', is only the start. Out of that faith a fuller revelation is to come. Later in his ministry Jesus will say, 'Seek first God's kingdom, then all these other things will be added.' To Nathanael he says, 'you will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on" the Son of Man.' This was the same revelation given to Jacob at Bethel when he met with God and the covenant with his ancestors was confirmed. (Genesis 28:12) Our limited expectations lead us to experience so much less of God than there is to receive. There is more, much more. Listen for God's voice, respond, take that step of faith, experience the fullness of life with God.

SONG

[Trust And Obey](#)

BLESSING

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. [Psalm 139:7-10]

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 always. Amen.

<https://rydebaptist.xyz>