

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

24 January 2021

Dear Friends,

Every week for months now it seems like there have been massive shifts in the way the world appears. Sometimes it is like the giant swingometer of gloom goes back and forth between optimism and pessimism, sometimes further one way than the other. This last week we have seen several bright glimmers of hope. In many places, and for some of us, the vaccine against the current pandemic has been rolled out into ever increasing numbers of waiting arms. Yet at the same time a new variant of the virus is causing particular concern here in the UK, but even more devastatingly in Brazil, South Africa, and other countries with far fewer resources to confront such a wave of infections and rising death toll. Having now caused more civilian fatalities in the UK and several other countries since the second world war, this pandemic is now the greatest human tragedy and global disaster in all of our lifetimes.

Despite the picture that is emerging, with hospitals overwhelmed and greater numbers of neighbours, friends and family succumbing to this terrible disease, unbelievably there are still those denying the seriousness of the situation and failing to take the precautions and heed the guidelines to protect others as well as themselves. Conspiracies theories and lies are still out there, influencing many who will have decided not to take the vaccine which is frankly our civic as well as our Christian duty to accept if we truly love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and our neighbours as ourselves.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul reflects on the nature of human relationships at a time of crisis in mid first century society when it was expected the Christ would soon return and when persecution and other factors endangered the lives of many. Thus he says we should take these things seriously but hold onto them lightly, selflessly not selfishly, for 'the time is short' and 'this world in its present form is passing away.' Today we are seeing the world change rapidly before our very eyes. There will be no going back to the way that things were, in so many areas of life. We should treat the things we have as stewards, not as if they are ours to keep, and we should not get engrossed in the things or the ways of the world. Sound first century Christian advice for twenty first century Christians!

There are many positive things to celebrate. There is clearly still a passion and appetite for truth and integrity as the United States of America inaugurated its new President and Vice President. None of us could possibly fail to be inspired by the prayers and benediction, the challenging poem from Amanda Gorman and Joe Biden's powerful address. We pray that the words of love and unity might translate into the agenda and actions of the people. Not just for Americans, but for us too. We pray that the new course of justice, openness and peace will influence the whole world for good, to the glory of God. Time is indeed short, and the world we once knew is passing away. As Jesus says, 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

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 a little while yet. Our Sunday Service is at 10.30am today on Zoom, 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. At 7pm this evening we join with Christian friends from other Ryde Churches, also on Zoom, for a short service to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which annually runs from 18 to 25 January. 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 62:1-12](#)

[Mark 1:14-20](#)

[1 Corinthians 7:29-31](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

'Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall never be shaken... My salvation and my honour depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.' [Psalm 62:1-2,7-8]

SONG

[All Creatures Of Our God And King](#)

[Above All Powers, Above All Kings](#)

FOR REFLECTION & PRAYER

"Never resign yourself to the scandal of the separation of Christians who so readily profess love for their neighbour, and yet

remain divided. Make the unity of the body of Christ your passionate concern." [The Rule of Taizé in French and English, 2012, p.13]

Are you resigned to the scandal of separation of Christians?

What part of your tradition is vital and life giving and what can you learn from what is vital and life giving within other Christian traditions?

What could be the impact on the world of greater unity between the churches?

'I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement.' [1 Corinthians 1:10]

'Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.' [Ephesians 4:3]

'From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.' [Ephesians 4:16]

Consider and commit to one act of unity.

Holy Spirit, vivifying fire and gentle breath, come and abide in us.

Renew in us the passion for unity so that we may live in awareness of the bond that unites us in you.

May all who have put on Christ at their Baptism unite and bear witness together to the hope that sustains them.

Amen.

SONGS

[Our Father In Heaven](#)

[Happy Day](#)

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

Several times over the last couple of months we have reflected on the beginning of Mark's *Gospel*, the earliest eyewitness account of the life and ministry of Jesus, because the words are so important: "The Beginning of the *good news* about Jesus the Messiah the Son of God." Introductions tell us so much; they set the scene. For the first thirteen verses we are introduced to John the baptising forerunner, a prelude if you like, culminating in Jesus' commissioning in water and Spirit. Verse 14 introduces the first full movement with these dynamic words: "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'"

John in Prison. If you visit Machaerus, Herod's palace with its dungeons on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea just south from where John baptised, you will see how remote and cut off this is. John's ministry has come to an end in the far south, whilst Jesus' ministry now begins up north. There is complete separation both in time, space and vocation (reflecting and fulfilling the transition of prophets Elijah to Elisha in the same area).

Jesus went into Galilee. This separation is further emphasised as Jesus from Nazareth in the north, a more Romanised culturally mixed community, now moves into the stricter Jewish context of the towns and villages around the lake. It is here that Jesus recruits his first disciples, nurtured among hard-grafting, God-fearing, synagogue-educated, Messiah-expecting Galilee people (separated from the compromised, corrupt, controlling religious institution based in Jerusalem in the south).

The Good News of God. Separation is clearly an important component of this good news, or gospel. God has become separated from sinful people, and for that relationship to be restored the people need to be separated from their sin. What is impossible for people is possible for God and is the mission and purpose of his Son.

The Time has Come. We could take up much space outlining all the cultural, religious and spiritual reasons why this was a good time for Jesus to emerge onto the world stage, but in the end the time was right because it was God's timing not human timing, and Jesus announces that this is so. From now on, as in no time before, here is an important message, an imperative to be heard, responded to, and acted upon. Why like no time before? Because now God doesn't speak through judge or king or prophet but personally, in his own voice, in the person of his own Son.

The Kingdom of God has Come Near. This is at the crux of why this time is so different from before. Whilst so many things need to be separated, the thing that is most important of all has come close and into proximity. God the creator who made and knows his creation intimately, and who walked with human beings in the garden he had created until human sinfulness had caused the separation, now walks again on terra firma in the feet of his Son. For years the Word had been recorded, written, passed on through others (prophets, rabbis, etc.), variously understood and misunderstood, and direct revelation from God was rare (as we heard last week in 1 Samuel 3). Now God speaks personally and we hear his voice. When we see Jesus we see God. When Jesus speaks it is God speaking. When Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, speaks the

kingdom of God has literally come near. We hear Jesus speaking because we are now standing in the throne room of God.

Repent. Everything has changed. Whereas before there was nothing we could do, now there is something we must do. Because Jesus stands before us we must repent, turn around, do things differently, stop running, face the music, take the consequences knowing that Jesus is here with us, for us, enabling restoration and reconciliation and paying the ultimate price himself. It is personal. It is direct. We cannot avoid it or hide behind something else or someone else. It acknowledges and does not deny or blame. It involves a cost. Grace acknowledges that Jesus does this for us, but we respond by allowing his Spirit to transform us, to remove the veil from our eyes, to know ourselves (ultimate self-knowledge) even as we are fully known by him (Psalm 139 again).

The way we communicate today illustrates this really well. Modern technology is really useful, and Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Email, Text Messaging, all have their place. The problem is that they are no substitute when it comes to personal communication. These electronic and digital formats can all be abused, manipulated, and controlled in ways that break relationships and promote discord. We only have to remember Trump and the media over the past four years to understand this. We can not honestly say sorry by email, just as we do not break up a relationship by text. It communicates insincerity. A handwritten letter is different because of the time and commitment invested in its composition. A telephone call is much better because we can hear the tone of voice and intonation, and perhaps the stutters, and it allows for two-way in-

teraction - there is nowhere to hide and more openness and honesty can be shared - we can sense whether someone means what they say. Meeting face to face is always the best way. Eyeball to eyeball. This is so difficult at this time of Covid safety and social distancing, so we must use the next best available means. That is why we are so thankful for Facetime, Zoom and other video conferencing tools because we can see the faces, gauge the emotions, develop the relationship. They are a real gift at this time.

Believe the Good News. But the best gift is Jesus. He is the message and the messenger. He is the one who both enables and promotes direct communication. We don't need priests and vicars as gobetweens any longer. We must not use others to do things on our behalf. The good news is that by what Jesus has done we can now, through him, speak directly with Father God. And we must speak directly with each other too if we are to build meaningful missional relationships with each other and the world. The message and the messenger are one. If we don't practise it, then we don't believe it!

SONG

[Abide With Me](#)

BLESSING

'One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: "Power belongs to you, God, and with you, Lord, is unfailing love'; and, 'You reward everyone according to what they have done.' [Psalm 62:11-12]

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.

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