

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

14 February 2021

Dear Friends,

Today is Valentine's Day, or more properly Saint Valentine's Day, and many of you will be giving and receiving cards and gifts to mark this happy day. This day mostly associated with gestures of romantic love is a far cry from its origins as a feast day inaugurated at the end of the fifth century to commemorate the third century martyr Saint Valentine of Rome. There are numerous Valentines known to have lived in this period, but this Valentine is particularly remembered for coming to the aid of fellow Christians during particularly difficult times of persecutions, and there are several miracles attributed to him.

In exploring some of the stories about Valentine we can see resonances with accounts of Saint Nicholas, and indeed several others who became known as saints because of their sacrificial service towards those in need or danger and who were themselves eventually martyred. You would never know this from the way that the day has developed in more recent years, mostly as a result of the greetings card industry and other commercial interests seeking to capitalise on the occasion. Yet it remains a convenient date in the diary to remind couples to express their love for one another, particularly during its initial blooming or when it has long since been taken for granted.

There is much about the day that remains a mystery. It is easy for those of us not in relationships to become cynical about such things, and ignore the day altogether. It has become a tradition in many places

for cards to be sent anonymously, adding to the anxiety of many a young person until the mystery is revealed.

There is much mystery in our Bible readings today, such as in the way that Elijah is suddenly taken up into heaven in a whirlwind whilst Elisha stands watching. If you continue reading from 2 Kings 2:13 onward you will see how the mystery continues as Elisha takes up Elijah's mantle. The transfiguration of Jesus is also a mysterious occurrence, when Elijah and Moses appear standing beside him up on the mountain. For the disciples witnessing this event there is a continuing mystery for them about what Jesus had said and what it means. Mysteries are there to be solved.

The good news of Jesus is that God doesn't want his love to be a mystery any longer. That is why Jesus was born into the world to reveal God's love for himself. Jesus speaks about God's love, he demonstrates God's love, and he is himself the living presence of God's love among all people. When we look at Jesus we don't need to remain live in the dark about just how much God loves us.

We are reminded of this every time we break bread and share wine in communion, as we shall do in our online Zoom service together today. The mystery of the bread and wine reveal to us the broken body and poured out blood of Jesus, the loving sacrifice he took on for our sake. It is to the cross of Jesus we look when we want to know just how much God loves us, taking upon himself our sin and suffering so that we can live freely forgiven lives.

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 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 online at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

BIBLE READINGS

Psalm 50:1-6

2 Kings 2:1-12

Mark 9:2-9

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Mighty One, God, the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to where it sets. From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth... 'Gather to me this consecrated people, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.' [Psalm 50:1-2,5]

SONGS

Let Everything That Has Breath

Holy And Anointed One

FOR REFLECTION

Those who use *Every Day With Jesus* for their daily devotions will have been reflecting on Prayer during last week. Also on Thursday we began our eight week of *The Prayer Course*. Reflect on how God wants you to grow in your prayer relationship with Him, with other Christian brothers and sisters, and with His church.

PRAYER

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Lord, we thank you for the privilege of being able to carry everything before you in prayer. We thank you that you reveal yourself to us in prayer. Even though we often see prayer as a mystery, thank you that the more time we spend in your presence the clearer we see things. Thank you for the encouragement of *The Prayer Course* this week, with its reminder to keep it simple, to keep it real and to keep it up. Keep us on track when we stray, keep us motivated when we might give up, keep us empowered by your Spirit that we may be bold and courageous. As we turn our eyes on you, help us to see the world as you see it, and join in your great mission to transform the world in your love.

Grant, we beseech thee, O Lord, that by the observance of this Lent we may advance in the knowledge of the mystery of Christ, and show forth his mind in conduct worthy of our calling; through Jesus Christ our Lord. [5th Century Prayer]

I am only a spark. Make me a fire.

I am only a string. Make me a lyre.

I am only a drop. Make me a fountain.

I am only a hill. Make me a mountain.

I am only a feather. Make me a wing.

I am only a rag. Make me a king! [Anon]

SONGS

Nothing But The Blood of Jesus

Behold The Lamb (Communion Hymn)

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

There are certain places on earth where it seems like the veil between heaven and earth is very thin, and there are times when we get the opportunity for glimpses of God's kingdom within an otherwise very human experience.

Down By The Riverside. I've had the privilege of visiting the area around the south of the river Jordan from both sides, within Palestine and also in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. On the east bank, up on the slopes, among the mine fields of recent conflicts, stand numerous churches commemorating the ministry of Elijah and Elisha; whilst over on the west bank, beyond where John baptised, stands Jericho, the lowest and longest continuously occupied city on earth. It is a mysterious place, part desert, part wilderness, rocky and dusty except where the springs around Jericho and the low ground around the Jordan support an oasis of greenery. You can see the heat haze rise up from the floor, and when a warm breeze strikes then swirls of dust and sand rise into the air. It is easy to imagine Elijah's rolled up cloak dividing the river so that he and Elisha could cross, and the scene where the chariot and horses of fire appear, dividing them, as Elijah is whisked off into heaven. If you stand in this spot you can imagine, in your mind's eye, all this come together. Elisha sees Elijah as he is taken up, and as promised Elisha inherits the spirit of Elijah twofold. Elisha is anointed into the prophetic ministry of Elijah, his father in the faith, and the baton (in the form of his mantle/cloak) is passed on.

Up On The Mountain. For some people being up high gives them a greater sense of perspective and proportion, and a closer proximity to heaven. I've lost count

of the number of high places that I have visited over the years. One of the great unknowns of the New Testament is where the transfiguration took place. The traditional place is Mount Tabor in the north near Galilee at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley. There is a church there commemorating the event. However it might just as easily be much further north, on even higher ground, such as on Mount Hermon. Here on the high place there is a real sense of heaven and earth colliding as well as past and future coming into sharp present focus. Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets, in whose footsteps Jesus comes in fulfilment. Jesus' appearance is transformed and Peter, James and John get to see him in all his glory. They glimpse the divine Jesus through the mystery of his transfigured humanity. They hear confirmation as Father God proclaims, 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!' What we already know, because these words reflect what was said as Jesus came out of the water at his baptism, the three disciples now get to hear too.

All Will Be Revealed. Among the ordinariness or even the struggle of daily life, I wonder how often we long for a glimpse or a vision of something that will motivate us or encourage us to keep on fulfilling our calling. Elisha sees what has happened to Elijah and is commissioned for the mission he must now undertake on his own, in his own right. He is empowered for service. For Peter, James and John, even though they are frightened and don't totally understand what is going on, this powerful glimpse of the lid of the box will help them make sense of the puzzle as they gradually put all the pieces together. When we are in the dark, not knowing what is going on, we do long for someone to come and turn on the light; and for those who live in the

dark the light can be truly blinding. Those whose vision of life is worldly, how can they ever hope to see heaven? As Peter, James and John discover, with Jesus the reign of God is revealed in all its fullness. Even though they don't yet understand it, and have been told to keep what they've seen to themselves (more of the 'Messianic secret' idea we heard about a few weeks ago), their horizons are enlarged and they are left discussing the meaning of 'rising from the dead'. They should certainly know by now that following Jesus is literally a matter of life and death.

The Great Unveiling. The word 'veil' is an interesting one. Most translations use it in 2 Corinthians 4:3 for the Greek word which literally means 'hidden'. So it is not like a wedding veil through which a groom gets a glimpse of his beautiful bride, or even a net curtain. It is more like a velvet curtain or cloth put over a plaque or statue before its unveiling, so that it cannot be seen in advance. Otherwise the image of blindness in verse 4 would not work. The good news of Jesus is in the corollary of these verses though. For those who are being brought to life, the gospel is no longer veiled; those who meet with the Saviour are healed of their blindness so that they *can* 'see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.' In our humanity we may now see only in part, a glimpse of that glory, but in the fullness of time we shall see all as it most fully is. Jesus chose to take Peter, James and John with him up onto the mountain for this experience of his glory. These will be the apostles who will take on the mantle of Jesus, as the baton is passed on by the Holy Spirit, after Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension – even in their human weakness. It is reassuring that even here Peter's fear had

turned his rational speech to gibberish. There would be a later occasion when fear got the better of him and he went on to deny that he even knew Jesus. Yet this mountain top experience gave him and his companions an essential insight into who they were following and serving. 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!' We would do well to see this, hear this, and obey this too. [Aside: it might be profitable to reflect on verse 7 alongside John 2:5 where Mary the mother of Jesus at the Wedding at Cana says to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you to do.]

Listen To Him. This is such an important question. If Jesus is the Son of God, whom he loves, do we really listen to him? Not just listen with our ears, but listen with our heads, hands and hearts so that our whole selves are transformed? Not just listen in agreement, or just out of interest, but in order to grow and develop into full maturity in Christ? Not just listen in principle but also in practice, so that we are swift to obey everything that he has taught us? What an enormous difference to our lives and to the world it would make if we really did listen to Him.

SONG

What A Friend We Have In Jesus

BLESSING

For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. [2 Corinthians 4:6]

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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