

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

21 February 2021 - 1st Sunday of Lent

Dear Friends,

With Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday behind us, we are now well into the season of Lent. There are lots of ways of travelling towards Easter, and some of us use study materials to guide us along the path. A number of us are using *The Prayer Course* as a way to mark off the weeks before our commemoration of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. Lent has always been a time to consider and to reflect on our relationship with the Lord, and his invitation to take up our cross and follow him. It is also a good time to look back on our journey thus far and to review our commitments and progress.

One of the features of these winter months has been the amount of rain we have. Often when sunshine follows the showers there are rainbows to be seen in the sky, their spectrum of bright colours contrasting against the dark clouds. A few weeks back there were a large number of rainbow sightings, and many photos appeared on Facebook from right across the country. As I have explained before, when I see rainbows the first thing I think of is standing in a window with my Mum and brother singing a rainbow song about God's love. Then, of course, thoughts go straight to Noah and the story of the rainbow after the safe landing of the ark.

Signs and symbols, like rainbows, are important marks of our relationship with God. When we talk about the covenant relationship signed with the rainbow, we usually talk about God making a covenant with Noah alone. Yet, when I recently re-

read the passage from Genesis 9 I noticed a number of important things. Firstly, God spoke to Noah and his sons with him - so it wasn't just Noah. Then God says he establishes his covenant with 'you and your descendants after you' - which means it isn't exclusively Noah and his sons but everyone who comes after them, which includes us.

Next we learn that the covenant applies to all the living creatures on earth too - which really does fill out this amazing promise that 'As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease' [8:22] and 'never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy all life.' The covenant is universal, because God loves the world!

Finally we are told that 'whenever' the rainbow appears the 'everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures' is to be remembered. This is mindblowingly amazing, because it means the covenant then still stands today.

Peter in his first letter reminds us of how powerful the symbol continues to be. The floodwater had destroyed all life except that on board the ark, but now the covenant is renewed in Christ who goes down into the water and comes up out of it, not to be drowned to death but to be raised to life. Of the floodwater, Peter says, 'In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also...It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ'!

Zoom is the safest way for most people to meet at this time, and we have been doing so successfully for nearly a year. Our Zoom Sunday Service is at 10.30am today, and our Zoom Prayer Meetings begin 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 readings and songs. There is more information on our website at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 25:1-10](#)

[Genesis 9:8-17](#)

[Mark 1:9-15](#)

[1 Peter 3:13-22](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust... Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long. [Psalm 25:1,4-5]

SONGS

[Praise My Soul The King Of Heaven](#)

[Our God Is Stronger](#)

FOR REFLECTION

In Psalm 25 there are lots of references to teaching and learning and remembering. What are some of the things that God has taught you this past week? What are some of the important lessons that you have learnt? What things have you had reason to remember? What things do you need God to teach you? What things do you need to learn from and about God? What things do you really need to remember?

PRAYER

Spend some time pausing in God's presence, enjoying his company, and then turn from a time of adoration into confession.

Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good. [Psalm 25:6-7]

Lord God Almighty, grant your people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only God; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. [Church of England ASB 1980]

Think about the many resources you have around you to help in your prayers. The natural created world and your experience of God's love will help you in your worship and adoration. There will be lots of helpful links in the weekly 7/52. Your friendships and relationships will be a great source for your prayers, as will your newspapers and TV or radio news broadcasts. If you have an Apple or Android smart phone there is a very useful daily resource produced by 24-7 Prayer, the people behind *The Prayer Course*, called **Lectio 365**. You can find out more information about how to download the app at <https://www.24-7prayer.com/dailydevotional>. It is based around the word **P.R.A.Y.** **P**ause to be still. **R**ejoice with a Psalm and **R**eflect on Scripture. **A**sk for God's help, and **Y**ield to His will in your life.

Pray Continually. [1 Thessalonians 5:17]

SONGS

[We Bow Down And Confess](#)

[The Power Of Your Love](#)

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

We are a Baptist church, and it is to be expected that from time to time we focus our thoughts on something that is at the heart of our identity, heritage and culture: believers' baptism. All churches practice what they call baptism, but one of our distinct Baptist contributions is to demonstrate how the Bible clearly directs believers to be baptised, usually by full immersion, on the confession of their own personal faith as an act of obedience to the will of Jesus and as a sign of their commitment to a new way of life. The oldest traditions in the history of the church show that baptisms usually took place at Easter and that Lent was a time of baptismal preparation. Indeed, when I was baptised on Palm Sunday evening in 1979 it was during Lent that we focused on preparing for the significant occasion, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus himself.

Now I have heard it said by some that you don't need to be baptised to be a Christian, which is true in the limited sense that it is not by our works or deeds that we are saved but by our faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. However when Jesus tells us to be baptised and to baptise others, and when the early disciples preach a message that concludes with the challenge to believe and be baptised, we need a compelling reason not to demonstrate our inner convictions and our love for our Lord and Saviour through this outward sign of our inner obedience and commitment. We may be a new Christian taking our early steps in following Jesus, or we may have been worshipping God and part of the church of Jesus Christ for many years, it doesn't really matter and it is never too late to be baptised when we hear the Lord calling us to take that step.

Our reading from 1 Peter 3 tells us a lot about baptism, at a time when the early church faced persecution and baptism was a dangerous thing to go through, not just because of the water. But there is no reason to fear, and it looks as if Peter is remembering Jesus' own words that those who are persecuted because of their faith are truly blessed. 'But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.' Yes we do need to use words, being gentle and respectful towards those we are addressing, but actions can also be eloquent demonstrations of what we believe and where the hope that we have comes from.

The source of that hope and life, Peter reminds us, is in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus in whose footsteps we follow. As Jesus identifies with us by suffering for the forgiveness of our sins, 'the righteous for the unrighteous', so we identify with him in his death and resurrection. In Romans 6:3-11 the Apostle Paul likens baptism to being buried and rising again. 'We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.' [6:4] Through baptism we show that we have become new persons, new creations, the old life being crucified with Christ and being set free from the stronghold of sin.

In 1 Peter 3 the emphasis is on the water as the grave and we are reminded of the powerful flood waters that drowned all life but those saved by God through Noah on the ark. Peter adds a fascinating detail that on his death Jesus visited and preached to the imprisoned spirits of

those who had died at the time of Noah. We can't be sure exactly what Peter is getting at, only it emphasises that 'after being made alive' Jesus was able to address those who were dead in their sin. How much more, therefore, he is able to address us in ours. Only the eight people in the ark were saved at the time of Noah, but the waters of baptism speak eloquently of salvation for those who die to their sin and are raised in Christ.

Peter reminds us that 'this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience towards God.' Baptism is more important than we might think, not because of the act but because of what it demonstrates of our new open and honest relationship with God. Baptism might not save us in itself, but it does something profound to our relationship with God, with the church and with the outside world who are watching and witnessing what we are doing – taking off the old and putting on the new.

Some people may be fearful of water, whilst others may think that they are not good enough or are not ready. Rather than reasons not to be baptised, these are reasons for taking this courageous step of faith, and because of which baptism will be more meaningful. What God requires of us is really quite simple, yet profound. At the heart of it is to 'believe and be baptised'. [Mark 16:16, John 3:5, Acts 2:38] Baptism is an act of humility, of trust and of submission to God. Even Jesus was baptised at the start of his ministry by John in the river Jordan. Going down into the water and rising up out of the water at the beginning of his public ministry was a foreshadowing of his death and resurrection before returning to the Father.

Jesus was humbled, leading by example. 'And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!' [Philippians 2:8] By comparison the humility of baptism places us in a beautiful symmetry with the Son before the Father. 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' Likewise our baptism in Water and in Spirit identifies us as sons and daughters of the living God, coheirs with Christ. 'He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.' [Titus 3:5] Baptism changes us.

To be baptised is one of the most important things we can do in our Christian lives, for our own sake, for God's sake, for the sake of the church, and for the sake of the world to whom it demonstrates the death and risen life of Jesus. 'It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ', a message that points us through Lent to Easter Day. Let us thank God for our baptism; and if we've not been baptised let us consider how God is calling us to respond.

SONG

[I Will Sing The Wondrous Story](#)

BLESSING

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant. [Psalm 25:8-10]

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we with us all, now and always. Amen.

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