

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

28 February 2021 - 2nd Sunday of Lent

Dear Friends,

This last week has been significant in ways that many people may not have noticed. The death toll from Covid around the world has reached record highs, even as bookings surged for foreign holidays that people may not be able to take. Although the Covid vaccine is being rolled out globally, its arrival in the poorest and most vulnerable countries is far too slow – and the money set aside by the wealthy nations too little and too late for many. Unemployment levels are rising and many families are struggling in ways they have never experienced before, more so for those who have lost loved ones. There may not be signs of munitions and air raid sirens and so on, but there are many similarities with a world war and the toll to be paid will be felt for decades to come.

For some that may seem like a rather too pessimistic view. There are positive signs though, with infection rates beginning to fall and a road map to recovery announced by the Prime Minister. At our Church Members' Meeting on Monday we acknowledged that although it will be several months before we can begin to meet together in person, perhaps starting with smaller groups in outside spaces, at least we can begin to plan and prepare for that time. And there will be a great deal of deep praying and thinking needed before we can do so. Things will not go back to the way they were before lockdown, that much is very clear, obvious in fact. Economically this will not be viable and our deficit budgets can not continue. More

significantly we will need to take a serious look at what it means to be Ryde Baptist Church for the years ahead. What is our vision and purpose? What is our mission? How prepared are we to listen to God and put that as our priority. If we are someone who used to 'go to church' then we will be challenged to think about what being part of an active church might mean for us personally today. None of us should really expect other people to do things for us, provide things for us, put things on for us, cater to us. Church is a family where we do things for each other, pray for each other, look out for each other, but mainly exists to share the good news of Jesus that we have received with other people too.

It was Archbishop William Temple who was recorded as having said, 'The Church exists primarily for the sake of those who are still outside it.' Sadly we can be so caught up with what is going on inside the church that we forget our purpose is to fulfil the mission of Christ. We can cling to our rights as church members, but forget that our chief responsibility is to fulfil the great commission of Jesus Christ to go into all the world and make disciples. If we are not disciples who make disciples, then in what way are we really a Christian church?

A huge thank you to Martin Light who has produced our Sermon Notes this morning helping us to consider our rights and responsibilities as human beings and as disciples of Jesus Christ, and how we can think about these things together in this complicated world. We look forward to reflecting on them in our online worship.

Zoom is the safest way for most people to meet at this time. Our Zoom Sunday Service is at 10.30am this morning, and we join other churches in Ryde for our monthly worship on Zoom this evening at 7pm. Our weekly Zoom Prayer Meetings start 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

[Psalms 119:25-32](#)

[Luke 6:27-36](#)

[1 Corinthians 10:23-33](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

'I gave an account of my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees. Cause me to understand the way of your precepts, that I may meditate on your wonderful deeds.' [Psalm 119:26-27]

SONGS

[How Great Is Our God](#)

[Here I Am To Worship](#)

FOR REFLECTION & PRAYER

If the Church should primarily exist for the sake of those outside of the Church rather than those inside it, what needs to be different in the future? What things haven't we been doing that we should have been doing? What things have we been doing that we shouldn't have been doing? What needs to change in our personal beliefs, opinions, priorities and commitments in order to make the difference?

'Father, give us courage to change what must be altered, serenity to accept what cannot be helped, and the insight to know the one from the other.' *Reinhold Niebuhr, 1892-1971*

This earlier version of Reinhold's famous Serenity Prayer emphasises the courage needed to embrace change. The later and more popular version reads:

'God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.'

In this version, change and courage come second. What difference does this make? Is it easier to sit back and relax whilst everything happens around us, rather than getting involved and becoming the change that we long to see.

Of course there are some things that we have no power or control of, and which we cannot change - but God can.

Other things need to change, and with the courage and wisdom that God gives us we can be fully involved.

Spend time in prayer, asking God for the gifts of courage and wisdom. Ask God for the courage to live with change and the courage to make the change that will enable his kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

SONGS

[Refiner's Fire](#)

[Overcome](#)

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

HOW DO I KNOW RIGHT FROM WRONG?

The Ten Commandments are a good place to start. They form the basis of civilised behaviour even among those who do not

follow Christian/Jewish beliefs. For example, a society where there is no respect for human life is not thought to be civilised (the Sixth Commandment).

Life however is not that simple. What is our response to those in great pain who support euthanasia? On what grounds might they say that it is right to bring life to a premature end?

The Law. The first response might be to refer to the Law. Our lawgivers decreed for many years, against majority public opinion, that the death penalty should no longer apply. Law, once the Royal Prerogative, is now made by Parliament and the Courts. Should we base our actions solely on what the Law says? Jesus warns us against legalism. The Law is valuable, but needs to be combined with mercy and even expediency. Those who criticise the Rwandan government for failing to bring all those involved in the genocide in that country to a fair trial ignore the cost and the length of time it would take to do this. The Law is not always just. Mothers had no rights in the welfare of their children at the start of the 19th century, however badly they were treated by the father. Which laws do you feel are unjust?

Love. Jesus puts love at the heart of the relationship with our neighbour. (Luke 6:27-35) But it does not always help us to know what is the best action. Giving an alcoholic money rather than food may not be helpful in the long run. It is right to debate the correctness of our actions.

In normal life our usual ethical standards – tell the truth; treat others as you want them to treat you; don't chase after your neighbour's wife/husband; don't steal – are the basis of our decision making. But what happens when we get difficult is-

suess, like Euthanasia? And is the command not to kill applicable when an armed policeman confronts a gunman threatening to kill a hostage or a classroom of children?

Rights. Rather than debate issues there are some philosophers, lawyers and judges who base their ethics not on the Ten Commandments but on Rights. Rights are a good idea. The idea that people have rights goes back a long way, to the Middle Ages, and we find it in the US Declaration of Rights in the 1770s and in the French Revolution. More recently, the revulsion felt about the treatment of Jews by Nazi Germany led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, with later modifications.

We welcome freedoms such as to preach the Gospel, the freedom to travel, the right to a fair trial. It is some of these we have had to sacrifice over the last year.

But does a right to have free speech mean that we have to welcome pornography? Free speech is under attack because it is allowing people to question good things, like vaccination. Despite the lack of any evidence, Trump supporters still believe he was robbed of victory in the elections because that is what they want to believe, and that is what some blogs on social media are telling them. The Chinese do not want free speech. They may be trying to end Christian teaching on social media. Can we have free speech for the Gospel but not for those peddling lies and harmful material (bomb-making, e.g.)?

It should be clear that these are issues that deserve debate. Those like Jack Donnelly argue that free speech should be an unfettered right, even if people use it to spread hate and lies. What do you think?

Soaked in Truth. Paul starts on his exhortation to the Philippians (4:8) to think about things that are true. We need to be soaked in truth. To ignore human sinfulness is however unbiblical. There are many law instructions in the Bible which take away unlimited freedoms. As Christians, we know we should not exploit our freedoms. Paul believed he had the right to eat all foods. But he argued that if exercising this freedom caused fellow-believers 'to fall' then it was better not to eat the meat sacrificed to idols. (Romans 14)

Dr David Cook draws on some ethical principles to help us in our decision making. They are:

1. Consider all the factors. This may well be helped by talking things through with others.

2. Which basic principles will guide our decision?

a) Which Scriptural teaching is relevant?

b) Has tradition any valuable teaching to say?

c) Has the Spirit or the Church some helpful teaching?

3. What are our aims, goals and objectives?

Among other questions, what will the consequences be of any action? (think of the legalisation of harmful drugs, for example). Banning alcohol may be desirable for many reasons. But is it practical and sensible?

4. Think carefully about alternatives, possibilities and choices.

5. Take other peoples' views seriously.

Too many people today think only their views should count, a product of existen-

tialism as well as selfishness. Think about the value of employees and employers looking at an issue through the eyes of the other party.

Most of the time we will not need to go through all this. But listen to the Moral Maze on Radio 4 and similar discussions on TV (The Big Questions) and these principles will help us make decisions on some of the big issues that are debatable. I especially commend the recent series on Radio 4 in which the presenter asks those who think differently from her to present and discuss their viewpoint, e.g. on euthanasia.

Finally, the Bible is realistic when it recounts human frailty. The Apostle Paul had arguments with other disciples and his travelling companions. He knew he needed the grace of God. Our first priority is to soak ourselves in the Bible, think through the implications of the exhortation to love each other and then try to get on and be open to the Spirit helping us to be like Jesus.

SONG

[Tell Out My Soul](#)

BLESSING

'I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws. I hold fast to your statutes, Lord; do not let me be put to shame. I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.' [Psalm 119:30-32]

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>