

# RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

## 14 March 2021 - Mothering Sunday

Dear Friends,

Well what a week this has been. It started well with International Women's Day last Monday, 8 March, and the serious media outlets reminding us that so many women around the world continue to be abused and undervalued, largely by men, despite the disproportionately overwhelming contribution that women make to the life and health of the global community. I read a sobering report that shows how this is reflected in our Baptist churches, that although women play vital roles using their gifts in local churches, this is not reflected in the proportion of women who are Baptist ministers, regional ministers or in senior leadership positions. This unbiblical injustice continues to affect people's lives and damages the image and the mission of Christ that we have been given. As men, it is incumbent upon us to accept the responsibility we have in this regard. Too many men in churches misread or misapply the Bible to justify their own false beliefs and behaviours towards women and their place within the kingdom of God.

Later on Monday evening we had the opportunity to listen to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex being interviewed by Oprah Winfrey. I know that some people have refused to listen to it. Yet whether it should have happened or not, it was important, and raised issues that as a society we need to address, particularly around areas of race and mental health, although bullying and security also featured highly. Anyone criticising the Duke and Duchess for giving the interview seriously needs to reflect

upon what that criticism says about their own heart. Every living person, no matter what their circumstance, who feels threatened, undermined, in danger, or who feels their mental health is at risk, is entitled and should be free to speak out in a way in which they will actually be heard. Sometimes it takes extreme measures before the right people are able to listen.

All this is very uncomfortable, both to hear in the first place and to write about. Some might believe that I am wrong to address it, but I will offer no apology. Until those who have no voice, or whose voice has been taken away from them, are able to be heard then we will continue to speak out. If the church as the body of Christ is not a safe place for anyone to come and meet with Jesus and find rest for their souls, then we have not been proclaiming the good news of the Gospel and there is much important work still to be done.

Today I will be thinking about the most important woman in my life story, my Mum. She played a necessary role in bringing me into the world and nurturing me until I could stand on my own two feet. She was a great woman of faith, without whom my own faith would not have been planted, grown and developed. She would be the first to say that she was not perfect, but I miss her greatly, as I have done for the last fifteen years. Most of us will be remembering our mothers in one way or another, and many of those memories will be mixed. We do so through the lens of God's love and grace which nurtures us as we stand and walk along the path of faith.

Zoom is the safest way for most people to meet at this time. Our Zoom Sunday Service is at 10.30am today, and our 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 would 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 107:1-3,17-22](#)

[Numbers 21:4-9](#)

[John 3:14-21](#)

[Ephesians 2:1-10](#)

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story – those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from the east and west, from north and south. [Psalm 107:1-3]

## **SONGS**

[Give Thanks To The Lord Our God And King](#)

[Now Thank We All Our God](#)

## **FOR REFLECTION**

While much of the world now thinks of today as Mothers Day there is something special about celebrating Mothering Sunday in the context of Christian worship. What can we learn and apply from the best of our Mothers to our life and mission as a church. As we reflect on our own experience, we might also think of Mary the mother of Jesus or our mother

church. In our hymn we thanked God, 'who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way.' We praise God for blessing us and we seek to bless others too.

## **PRAYER**

'Creator God, we worship you as one who loves us with a mother's love, and comforts us as a mother comforts her child. In Christ we see you as the vulnerable child of a teenage mother: loved and treasured, nurtured and protected, fed and clothed.

And so we thank you for the calling of motherhood, and pray that you would encourage all mothers as they live out their calling. We thank you for the memories they create in our hearts and the selfless devotion they offer. We thank you also for the commitment they show, the compassion they feel and the comfort they bring.

Today we pray for those countless mothers in our world who cannot care for their family as they would wish. For those who feel defeated in the call to motherhood. We think of those who have been unable to provide their children with food, and watch helplessly as poverty and malnutrition take their toll.

We think of those who have been unable to protect their children from the ravages of violence and war. We think of those who have failed to provide a stable home, and must take the road to live as refugees for the sake of their children's safety.

Lord we praise you for the unspeakable love that so often flows from mothers even in these darkest of situations, because it points us to the love you show to us. Move us we pray, to appreciate and support the mothers who live in our home or town, as well as to appreciate and sup-

port those who struggle in dangerous, poverty stricken and hungry places. Move us to action, that we might truly be committed to seeing your heavenly love ever-shining through the faces of all you have appointed to represent you as mothers.' [© Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church]

## SONGS

Never Once

The Lord's My Shepherd

## MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

It is an exciting thing to stand on the top of Mount Nebo in Jordan and look west over into the Promised Land, just as Moses did all those years before. Of course Mount Nebo is much further north than the place where this morning's story about Moses and the poisonous snakes takes place, yet nevertheless there is a connection. Mount Nebo is the site of the tall Brazen Serpent sculpture by Giovanni Fantoni depicting the bronze serpent lifted high on a pole as featured in the Numbers 21:4-9 account. The serpent can be seen for miles around.

It also resonates with the times that we live in. The bronze snake that Moses was told by the Lord to put up on a pole was intended to be the antidote so that if anyone was bitten by a venomous snake all they had to do was look at the bronze snake and they would not die. Antivenins or venom antiserums are constantly being researched; there are many poisonous creatures for whose venom we do not yet have the antidote, and many of these poisons are lethal. Similarly we have been living through an epidemic caused by a potentially lethal virus, that has taken away far too many actual lives, and we are all beginning to benefit from the antidote, the vaccines that have been developed.

That is what makes the story of the snake on the pole so gripping today. But we have to look at the snake on the pole. We have to follow all the precautions and take advantage of the vaccines when they are offered. The lethal snake bite loses its power. As an image or metaphor it is even more vivid, as the serpent's sinful venom first inflicted in the Garden of Eden now has an antidote that will counter and cancel its deadly conclusion for ever. Thus at the dead of night Jesus shares with the curious Nicodemus, 'Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.'

**Lifted Up.** The word for lifted up used here has a double meaning. Quite literally it means lifted up like a snake on a pole. In this sense it is a powerful foreshadowing of the Cross on which Jesus, the Son of Man, will be lifted up to die. It is quite deliberate that Fantoni's sculpture on Mount Nebo is in the form of a cross, standing on a sacred site managed by the Franciscans and where Christians have gathered and worshipped for the best part of two thousand years. Jesus mentions Moses lifting the snake as immediate prelude to the memorable synopsis of the gospel that follows: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.' [John 3:16-17] It is essential to look at Jesus, to look up at Jesus, to look to Jesus as Saviour, the antidote, the Lord the giver of life over death. So we look to the Cross of Jesus, at which all the venom of sin is pointed and where it is taken and it is transformed through sacrifice, suffering and a most extraordinary act of love.

**Risen and Exalted.** The words for lifted up also have another meaning, more akin to being displayed in all its glory - exalted. The death of Jesus on the Cross is not the end. It is not enough for the power of sin to be cancelled without the corollary, that is the risen life that follows. Jesus dies, and his death puts an end to death as we knew it, but on the third day he is raised to life, resurrection life, life in all its fullness as we shall know it for ever. The thief, the serpent, may have come to steal and destroy, but Jesus has come to bring eternal life in all its abundance. He is risen and exalted. He is ascended and enthroned. When Jesus shares this insight with Nicodemus at the dead of night, 'Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him', it is one of those light bulb moments. The lights are turned on in the darkness. 'This is the verdict: light has come into the world...whoever lives by the truth comes into the light'. [John 3:19-21]

**Loved and Lifted.** We read that 'because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.' [Ephesians 2:4-5] Jesus goes through all this so that we might die to our old sinful selves and rise again to a new life in him. But there is more. 'God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.' [vs 6-7] So we look up to the cross, we look up to Jesus, and in our looking up we are ourselves transported to a new risen and exalted life with him. The old has truly gone, the new is truly here.

**Take It Up.** We've all heard people talking about not trusting and not taking up the vaccine. There has been a lot of irresponsible misinformation, feeding into many people's understandable fears. Yet the vaccine is safe, more than that it is life transforming. Similarly there has been a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding over the years when it comes to the life transforming good news of Jesus Christ which we have been given the responsibility of living and proclaiming. Somehow, through our error or neglect, we have failed to communicate as clearly or as relevantly as we ought. For many it comes across as too complicated, far-fetched or too disconnected or unrelated to their lives and experiences. Yet freely giving away this precious gift from God is exactly what God has made us and prepared us to do. Just as it is our duty to be vaccinated, as part of the chain protecting lives in our community, so it is our calling and our active duty to live, breathe and pass on the good news we have received.

## SONG

[Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah](#)

## BLESSING

For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. [Ephesians 2:8-10]

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.

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