

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

21 March 2021 - 5th Sunday of Lent

Dear Friends,

Today is a very special Sunday. It is the last of the Sundays of Lent before Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday next week. It is also Census Sunday, the day chosen by the government to conduct the population census that happens every ten years, and has done since 1801. Early census details only exist in piecemeal form, but the population almost doubled in the next forty years, so the Population Act of 1840 marked the start of the modern census from 1841 onwards. Historians and others researching their family histories have been grateful for the increasing personal census information released every decade under the 100 year rule. The 1921 census due to be released next year will be the last for some time as the 1931 records were lost in a serious fire from bombing in the Second World War and there wasn't a census in 1941. So we are reminded of the numerous census and population counts that we find throughout the Bible, one of which plays a significant part in the early story of Jesus and his Bethlehem birth.

But this isn't all that makes this a special Sunday. I hesitate wishing you all a happy anniversary, but it was this time last year that we had to close our church building for worship in person, and we started producing and distributing this Sunday Service Sheet. We had very little notice from the government, and Baptist Union advice followed shortly after, but within a few days Sally had revamped the 7/52 notice sheet to be more appropriate for lockdown and fill the space usually filled by all

the events and activities we engaged in. Without a worship service in our George Street building to lead, I then set about producing this sheet with ideas and resources for our worship at home, with links to find readings and songs online, and a sermon outline to be followed. We have been doing this now, with just a couple of double issues, for the last year. We heard about using Zoom over the next few weeks and experimented with it on the Easter weekend of 9 to 12 April, with Maundy Thursday Communion, a Good Friday Coffee Morning and Easter Sunday Breakfast all online. Zoom Sunday Services began a week later on 19 April 2020. Attendance numbers at online Zoom services have gradually risen over the year.

So that all leaves us very grateful to God for the last twelve months, for his faithfulness to us as a church, that we have still been able to relate and connect with one another and worship and pray albeit in new and strange ways from the beginning. Monday Prayer Meetings went online from just after Easter too, and the number praying over Zoom is now double the size of the group that met when we were in our building. Amidst all the challenge and change we are stand amazed that we have been able to do so much together.

One of the recommended TV programmes we have suggested during the last year has been The Chosen, a dramatisation of the life of Jesus. There is a phrase in the programme that is memorable: 'Get Used To Different.' That is what our faith calls us to do, and which we will continue to do.

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 51:1-12,15-17](#)

[Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)

[John 12:20-33](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. [Psalm 51:15-17]

SONGS

[Praise To The Lord The Almighty](#)

[Above All Powers](#)

FOR REFLECTION

Tuesday 23 March marks the first anniversary of the first National Coronavirus Lockdown and the day has been set aside as a Day of Reflection to commemorate the tragic loss of life and stand alongside those who are grieving. Let us prepare over these next few days to join in with this reflection. Marie Curie has been given the privilege of leading this tribute and you can see their introductory video [here](#).

Set aside times of prayer on Tuesday:

12 noon - One Minute of Silence

8pm - Shine A Light Into The Sky

You can register to join the live national online event starting at 11.30am [here](#).

PRAYERS [from the Church of England]

Reflect. Loving God, You hold all our times in your hands, our past, our present, our future. Be close to us now as we remember all the difficulties and disappointments of the past year. Be especially close to all of us who are thinking of someone we loved and knew, but see no longer, whether family, friend, colleague or neighbour. Help us to trust that they are at peace with you, and comfort us with your presence.

Connect. Loving God, You place us in families and communities, and we give you thanks for all those around us who serve us and help us in so many ways. Give wisdom to community leaders, to our schools, hospitals, care homes and other agencies who make a difference to our lives. Help each of us to have the courage to reach out with thanks and kindness to those around us and to speak words of faith as we share the good news of your love.

Hope. Loving God, As we journey towards Easter, help us to live as people of hope, knowing that beyond the pain of the cross lies the joy of resurrection. Inspire us in our worship, through our churches and in our homes, that we may bring glory to you and joy to others. Be with those who are struggling in mind, body or spirit, and give courage to those who are facing uncertainty and change ahead. Help each of us to keep our eyes fixed on you, that we may reflect your light to all whom we meet.

CONFESSION

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. [Psalm 51:1-2]

SONGS

Lord Have Mercy

Cornerstone

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

As we speed through Lent we are probably all now very conscious that Easter is just around the corner. In the build up to Christmas it was suggested by some that things would be 'back to normal' and we would be gathering together by Easter, but as time has gone on we have had to be realistic and acknowledge that this just wasn't going to happen. In our Bible readings today there is an overarching theme that goes something like this: there is a time that was before, there is a time that will be after, but we live in the now and there are things that we can get on and do. What we can do has always been an important element of Lent: Confession.

Psalm 51:1-12,15-17. The Psalmist is very clear that in order for things to be different, something very significant in us has to change. This is something that we cannot do on our own. Yes, there is something that we need to do. But there is something more that only God can do for us, and the testimony of the Bible is that he is more than willing to do this if we ask. We need to acknowledge the wrong and the 'sin' in our lives, our 'transgressions' and 'iniquity'. It is important, as the Psalmist demonstrates, that we are honest before God about the extent and the con-

sequences of the problem before we ask for God's help. When we confess our sin before God there are three things that are needful and that he will do for us.

Firstly he can forgive us. 'Have mercy on me, O God' we can cry. We know that he is the God of 'unfailing love' and 'great compassion' who will not cast us out from his presence or withhold the Holy Spirit from us if and when we come honestly to him.

Secondly he can make us clean. 'Blot out', 'Wash away', my sin is the earnest prayer of our hearts, for we know we are unclean and need to be purified. 'Cleans me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' And then...

Thirdly he can make us new. The old heart is dirty, so we pray 'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me...Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.' This isn't just the old being rinsed off, but being made a new person.

When we are aware of the extent of King David's sin that has inspired this Psalm, and the relationship he has with God, we can be confident that God who hears, renews and sustains him, will hear us too.

Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Prophet Jeremiah looks forward to a time when the patterns and cycles of making and breaking promises with God, caused by sin and spoiling our relationship with God, will come to an end. The old covenant was a long time in the making, and we see its development traced in God's encounters with Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc., and renewed through the varying relationships between God and successive Judges, Kings and the interventions of numerous prophets. If the old covenant was flawed it was because it depended on human cooperation.

‘Yet the new covenant will not be like this. Through Jeremiah the Lord proclaims that ‘The days are coming... when I will make a new covenant’ which will be totally different from the previous one. This won’t be a law written in stone but one written in flesh and on hearts and minds. It will be a new personal relationship between God and his people, where they will come to “Know the Lord”. And the name of this new relationship is Jesus, our God saves!

John 12:20-33. Jesus personifies the new covenant with God that will be signed and sealed by his broken body and poured out blood. In John’s Gospel we get a privileged insight into Jesus’ thoughts as he approaches the time of his arrest, trial and crucifixion. This is no easy thing to face. It will be a real sacrifice. ‘Now my heart is troubled’, begins Jesus. But will he walk away? Will he ask God to save him from this moment, to change the plan? ‘No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!’ And so the will of God is clarified and confirmed.

Last week we reflected on the lifting up, the glorifying of Jesus. That reflection continues here. In Jesus being lifted up and glorified, so Father God is also glorified. In response to the prayer of Jesus, ‘Father, glorify your name!’, comes the audible sound of the Father’s voice, ‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.’ We are reminded of the voice declaring at Jesus’ baptism, ‘This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.’ The life, calling, mission and ministry of Jesus all point to and give glory to the Heavenly Father. God will be further glorified in the obedience of Jesus lifted up on the cross, and all that will follow. ‘I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ God is glorified as we look to his glorified Son.

The Difference between Life and Death.

‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.’

It isn’t life itself that we are praised for hating, but ‘life in this world’ - the sinful, self-serving, fallen, flawed life without God. Confession makes the difference. It puts away the past and embraces the new. A life of confession enables eternal life to begin in the present, in the here and now. Confession takes on its full double aspect, acknowledgement and responsibility for past failings but also now a confession of faith and trust in our God who forgives, cleanses and renews through the life, death, resurrection, ascension and eternal reign of his Beloved Son, our Saviour.

SONG

[Take My Life And Let It Be...](#)

BLESSING

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. [Psalm 51:10-12]

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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