



ST JAMES' CHURCH, ISLINGTON N1 8PH
14 February 2021 St Valentine Year B 21/7

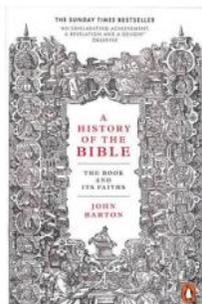
Readers: Sinead Burniston and Luigi Falcioni.
Interceder: Susan Sorensen
Cantor: Isabel Nisbet
AV editor: Adam Dickson
Music for the day:
Nat King Cole When I fall in love
Hayley Westenra Amazing Grace
Ben King Stand by me
Anthem: *Love Divine, Purcell arr Britten*

Collect: **Gracious God, you brought the world of creation into being out of love. May that same love fill the hearts and minds of all your people, that with tenderness and compassion every relationship may flourish with hope and joy and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**



Valentine's Day

BECAUSE the feast of St Valentine falls on a Sunday - and, better still, on the Sunday before Lent - I thought we might take the advice of the old Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, and celebrate St Valentine Day today rather than the theme set down in the service book. The bishop thought that we ought to get out a bit and celebrate all those days which (normally) fill our card shops like St Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day and Halloween! Aren't these what most people are thinking about? ! So today we will hear a version of the story of St Valentine; we will listen to some of the love songs that you would expect to hear around this time of the year, we will think about love and romance - and then we will see how these all fit in with Christian ideas about love before enjoying a version of one of the most famous hymns about love in the hymn book!



LENT 2021 Suddenly Lent is just around the corner! At the last PCC meeting on 18th January I asked if anyone would like to take part in some Lenten discussions based on a book - using Zoom as the easiest way of meeting up together? Several people thought it was worth trying and the book that was recommended was John Barton's 630 page 'History of the Bible'. I have a copy on order and would like to suggest that that we have three sessions (ie once a fortnight), based on a theme from the book. They would be in the weeks beginning February 22nd, March 8th and March 22nd. Anyone is welcome to take part; more books can be ordered (£10.50). Let me know if you are interested.

HELP WITH ADMINISTRATION As seen in Arena-88, we are looking for part-time help with parish admin. Please let us know if you can recommend anyone.

St James' Islington: discovering how to live like Jesus in the 21st century

FROM THE POLICE:



• Scammers are targeting elderly and the vulnerable in the society by offering to do shopping on their behalf. The scammers will simply take the money and never return.

• Individuals are being sent fake messages stating 'As part of the NHS promise to battle the COV-19 Virus, HMRC has issued a payment of £258 as a goodwill payment'. These messages are designed to steal your account details. This is usually sent as a text message. Do not click on the link provided.

• Scammers are targeting the vulnerable and elderly by offering them pills to prevent coronavirus or attempting to sell testing kits. These pills do not exist.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Thiago Chang is stuck in Brazil and can't get a flight back to the UK until late March at the earliest: Clem and Pierre Friry, newly returned from the south of France, can't return to their house because the repairs to the roof have been delayed by rain; and the writer Thomas Gerbeaux started his pre-baptism classes on Thursday!

THIS WEEK

Sun *ST VALENTINE Streamed 'Service of the Word' at 10am.*
 Tues 10am Proms Committee meets. Basic Christianity course session 2.
 Wed 6pm Grace Church, Alvin, Texas: zoom prayers.
 Thurs 6pm Evening Prayer. 6.15-7pm Office session in Church.
 Sun 21 *LENT 1/ASHING SUNDAY Streamed 'Service of the Word' at 10am.*

Calendar and Daily Prayer themes

Sun 14 *St VALENTINE* Ken and Margaret Thompson; Fr Victor de Waal
 Mon 15 *DEL Wk 5* Belle Williams, Tom, Poppy, Pearl and Bow Wheatley
 Tues 16 *Feria* Tim Willis; Lucy McAllister, Jay, Ava, Ivy and Bella Wilson
 Wed 17 *ASH WEDNESDAY* Chris and Chrissie Wright; Kate Yeats
 Thurs 18 *Feria* Shannon Adams, Arabella and Rocco Macdonald
 Fri 19 *Feria* Lisa, Darren, Max and Oscar Ahmet Baker; Louise, Vinney and Benjy
 Sat 20 *Feria* Martin, Kerri, Rebecca and Joseph Allen; Beatrice Awoonor-Renner
 Sun 21 2 *b LENT* Vicky Bellamy, Holly, Josh Campbell; Albert and Annie Bryan

PRAYER BOARD/NOTICES Requests for prayer welcome

BIRTHDAYS Many Happy Returns on Monday to Fr Stephen Taylor and on Friday to Freddie Jenkins who will be 3.

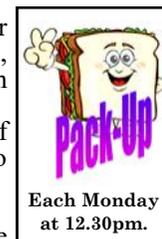
SICK Christopher Browne, Jennifer Franich, Mariolina and Peter Freeth, Emily Grainger, Kris Hyde, Hayley Jenkins, John, Kingsley Lewis, John Scott, Charlie Sharpe, Vera Taggart, Lyn Thompson and Melanie Toogood.

DEPARTED We pray for the soul Jackie Karas (Clock Tower Mews) and of Margaret Hodges who died on the 1st February. We pray also for Michael Flinter who died suddenly in New York.

ANNIVERSARIES 17th: Lily Goddard; 20th: Barbara Elsworth-Jones (2012).

INTERNATIONAL CHURCH LINKS In the US: Suzanne Smith, Rector of Grace Church, Alvin, Texas. Suzanne's husband Travis is Rector of Holy Comforter, Angleton, 14 miles away. Japan: Fr Sebastian and Yuki Naniwa serving in Ehime near Hiroshima.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE Our prayers continue for **Nazanin Zaghari Radcliffe** in the hope that some kind of formula can allow her to return to the UK as soon as possible.



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SERVICE OF THE
WORD
for the Sunday before Lent
St Valentine's Day
Sunday February 14th 2021

as streamed from
St James' Church
Islington N1

SERVICE OF THE WORD FOR ST VALENTINE'S DAY

Entry Music: Nat King Cole *When I fall in love*

*When I fall in love it will be forever
or I'll never fall in love
In a restless world like this is
love is ended before it's begun
and too many moonlight kisses
seem to cool in the warmth of the sun
When I give my heart it will be completely
or I'll never give my heart
and the moment I can feel that you feel that way too
is when I fall in love with you.*

Introduction

Welcome to St James' Church, Islington, for this Service of the Word for the Feast of St Valentine!

For many years this final Sunday before Lent has been an opportunity for us to celebrate Mardi Gras; to say thank you for all the good things we normally enjoy before we try to adopt a simpler and more disciplined life-style during Lent and the run-up to Easter! To make that point, this has been the day for the annual indoor children's party when our children and their parents come to the Hall to be entertained by clowns and comics, to play party games and to munch their way through endless packets of crisps and biscuits!

But we couldn't resist the fact that February 14th has fallen on the Sunday before Lent this year so I hope that, together, we can use St Valentine's Day to focus our hearts and minds on love and relationships - with each other and with God.

The 'sound' of this service is going to be slightly different from usual as we are going to intersperse our readings and reflections with some familiar love songs instead of hymns. Everything in creation is 'godly'! But the heart of our service is the Gospel story. It is the time when a girl is dragged in front of Jesus because she had broken the first rule of family life: she had not been faithful to her husband. The priests holding on to her wanted to catch Jesus out and this was the perfect chance. Whatever he said was bound to break one rule or another. Or so they thought...

But first let us call to mind the presence of God - wherever we are - thanking him for all that he has given us this week; thanking him too for the fellowship of the Church which links us not just with other members of St James' but also with our fellow Christians around the world and with all who look to Christ to surround them with his love.

We start with our Collect for St Valentine's Day:

Gracious God, you brought the whole of creation into being out of love. May that same love fill the hearts and minds of all your people, that with tenderness and compassion every relationship may flourish with hope and joy and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Story of St Valentine

The story of St Valentine is - that we don't know anything much about St Valentine! There are lots of legends and myths but not many hard facts!

Splitting truth from fiction is almost impossible but if we look hard enough - underneath all the hearts and Valentine's Day cards with their cupids, kisses and cryptic verses - there are still ideas worth thinking about!

As far as we can tell Valentine was a bishop during the cruel rule of a Roman Emperor called Claudius II, also known as Gothicus. Gothicus spent most of his time fighting but he also hated Christians and Valentine was one of many who were arrested. In those days, important prisoners were often locked up in the houses of rich nobles and Valentine ended up in the home of someone called Asterius.

Over time Asterius became interested in what Valentine believed and at the end of a long talk about how Jesus came to lead pagans out of darkness into the light, Asterius said he would convert to Christianity - but only if the bishop could cure his foster-daughter who was blind.

According to the legend, Valentine put his hands on the eyes of the girl and said: *Lord Jesus Christ, en-lighten your servant because you are God, the True Light.* Instantly the girl could see again and Asterius kept his word. All the family were baptised.

The Word of God

1st Reading: (1 Corinthians 13) If I had the gift of being able to speak many languages without learning them first, in fact if I could speak every language there is in heaven or on earth - but didn't love the people I was speaking to - it would be nothing more than the sound of crashing drums or tinkling cymbals!

If I had the gift to prophecy and could see at a glance what was going to happen in the future; if I knew everything about *everything*, but didn't love the people I was talking to, what good would it do me? Even if I had enough faith to be able to tell the mountains to move, it would still be pointless unless I did it with love. If I gave everything I had to the poor, if I let myself be burned alive for preaching the Gospel, but didn't love others, it would be absolutely no use at all.

Love is patient, love is kind - never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty, selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will barely notice when others do wrong. It is never glad about injustice but is glad whenever truth wins out. If you love someone you will be loyal to them no matter what the cost. You will always believe in them, always expect the best of them and always stand your ground in defending them.

When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned like a child does. But when I became an adult my thoughts grew up too. My ideas now are far bigger than anything I could imagine in my childhood. I have put away childish things.

The same is true about our knowledge of God. Now we can only see and understand him a little. It is as if we are peering at his reflection in a poor mirror. But some day we are going to see him as he really is, face to face. Now all I see is hazy and blurred, but one day I will see everything clearly - just as clearly as God sees into my heart right now.

Now I know that there are three things that will last - faith, hope and love - but the greatest of them all is love.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Unfortunately Gothicus was in Rome and heard what had happened. He ordered Valentine and all the family to be executed and that took place on February 14th 269ad. According to tradition, Bishop Valentine signed his last letter to Asterius' foster-daughter: 'from your Valentine'.

After his death one of Asterius' neighbours managed to carry Valentine's body so that it could be buried with other local Christian martyrs on the road to Rimini. You can still see the chapel there today.

The story of Bishop Valentine became more and more famous and in 496ad Pope Gelasius made him a saint. But so far there was no connection between St Valentine and the way men and women sent love messages.

It took another thousand years before Geoffrey Chaucer wrote about the way true gentlemen should go about finding a woman to love but it was not until the 18th century that there was a tradition of giving cards and small gifts - signed 'from your Valentine'.

To start with these were written by hand; today more than 25million printed Valentine cards are bought each year in the UK.

Gospel Acclamation:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Jesus said, Love one another as I have loved you. Alleluia.

A Reading from the Gospel according to John

Early one morning Jesus returned to the Temple. Many people joined him and he began to teach them. As he spoke some of the priests walked towards him, pulling a young girl after them. Jesus asked them why they were treating her like that?

Wanting to catch Jesus out so that they could arrest him the leader replied, 'Teacher, we caught this married woman in bed with a man who is not her husband. Now the law of Moses says that we should stone her to death. What do you think we should do with her?'

Quietly Jesus stood up, bent down and wrote something in the dirt with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, Jesus stood up straight and said to them, 'Let whoever among you has never done anything wrong be the first to throw a stone at her.' And again he bent down and wrote something on the ground with his finger.

When the priests heard what Jesus said, they did not know what to say. But one by one, beginning with the oldest, they crept away, leaving the woman on her own standing next to Jesus. Then Jesus said, 'Where have they all gone? Isn't there anyone left to accuse you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. Then Jesus said to her, 'Neither am I going to condemn you. Go away, but don't do it again.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Music: *Amazing Grace*: Hayley Westenra

*Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares
we have already come.
Was grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead us home.*

*When we've been there a thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we first begun.*

This story of a girl being dragged in front of Jesus simply leaps out of the pages of St John's Gospel. For a start there are so many details we would like to know. Was it family or friends, prying neighbours or zealous religious police who discovered what she was up to? Had it just happened or was this a convenient test case to try and catch Jesus out? And what was her side of the story? What would social media have made of it today? Are we tempted to think that it wouldn't have been a story at all these days unless she was some kind of celebratory?

My feeling is that it stands out from the page because the story has a sexual element to it. If it was about any of the other deadly sins - from theft to a bad fit of temper - we wouldn't be quite so interested. St John isn't stupid: he knew how to get our attention. Sex sells; it always has.

But that shouldn't distract us from the more fundamental question this Gospel is trying to get us to think about. Here was a married woman who was off with another man. But what she was caught doing was only the final bit of the story. Long before that she had broken the promises she made to her husband: she had deserted him in heart and soul and mind. She had torn up not just their emotional attachment to one another but the legal covenant as well. Trust and solidarity were gone. And in that society the penalty was just too awful to think about.

Sadly she wasn't the first and she certainly isn't the last person for whom the bonds of love have slipped away out of reach. We think we are a lot more civilised about these things now: we have 'no fault' divorce proceedings and lots more support mechanisms - for couples as well as for any children - than was the case in the past.

Yet none of those things take away the deep hurt and pain of knowing that the person you have exchanged vows with - *to love and to cherish till death do us part* - have broken their word and left you. That Covid advert on our screens at the moment, which invites us to look into the eyes of those suffering with coronavirus and to answer the question whether we have done everything we could to protect them, is equally applicable here. Without being watched or bullied into action, have we done everything to keep the marriage vows we made? And the truthful answer is bound to be, no.

The girl in the story has no excuse and nowhere to run to. The priests who dragged her there knew they had 'right' on their side. But they didn't know Jesus.

Who might, in other situations, have sat them down and listed all the times when the people of Israel had broken their solemn promise to remain faithful to God. It's all there for us to read.

In Exodus for example, no sooner has Moses turned his back after the amazing escape from Egypt across the Red Sea, than his brother Aaron is conniving with the community leaders to make statues of gods out of women's jewelry! In fact there is whole book about desertion in the Old Testament, written by the prophet Hosea who uses his unstable marriage to Gomer as a way of showing how God agonized when Israel tore up its promise to be faithful. Three times Hosea gets her back from the streets, cleans her up and tries to start again.

But what does that take? Patience - and a real willingness to look, with love, beyond the immediate thing that has gone wrong. In the words of St Paul which Sinead read for us: *Love is patient, love is kind - never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty, selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will barely notice when others do wrong. It is never glad about injustice but is glad whenever truth wins out. If you love someone you will be loyal to them no matter what the cost.*

That is not to say that people can do whatever they want, and will always be forgiven. In the case of the girl in the story, Jesus is not saying it was OK for her to be sleeping around. But there has to come a time when someone's genuine apology has to be enough to build bridges and to start again.

It is that capacity to be realistic and honest - and not to hate someone because they have failed - that lies at the heart of God's love. *For better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health...*

If *nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus*, how much more do we owe patience and forgiveness to those around us in our family relationships, trusting - but not demanding - that they will be willing to do the same for us too.

Reflections on love, families and relationships

During this next sequence I would like to celebrate St Valentine's day with some short sayings which I hope capture something of what loving, and being loved is all about - and a time to reflect on the love that you share in your life. The song is Ben King's 'Stand by me'.

When the night has come and the land is dark
and the moon is the only light we'll see
No I won't be afraid, no I won't be afraid
Just as long as you stand, stand by me

So darlin', darlin', stand by me, oh stand by me
Oh stand by me, stand by me

If the sky that we look upon should tumble and fall
Or the mountains should crumble to the sea
I won't cry, I won't cry, no I won't shed a tear
just as long as you stand, stand by me

And darlin', darlin', stand by me, oh stand by me
Oh, stand now by me, stand by me, stand by me

Whenever you're in trouble won't you stand by me
Oh stand by me, won't you stand by me.

Affirmation of Faith

As members of the family of God we affirm our faith:

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Confession

**God of mercy, we admit to you
the darkness that lies within us.**

**In faith and in hope we repent of our sins
the evil we have done
and the good we have failed to do.**

**For the sake of Jesus who died for us,
forgive us for all that is past,
and help us to live each day
filled with the light of Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from all our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Anthem: Love Divine Words by Charles Wesley, after John Dryden
Music: Henry Purcell arr Benjamin Britten

*Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.*

*Finish then thy new creation:
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.*

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for the family of the Church, for all loving relationships and for the life of our families and friends.

Jesus, born in a borrowed stable and soon a refugee: be with families today who live in poverty, in hunger and in want: we remember especially the children of Bonda and all those caught up in war, in Somalia, Syria and Afghanistan.

Lord of love, **in your mercy hear us.**

Jesus, you grew in wisdom within the family of Joseph the carpenter: be present in the lives of all young families so that their children may come to know your care for them.

Lord of love, **in your mercy hear us.**

Jesus, you blessed marriage in the wedding at Cana; be with all those preparing for life-long commitment at this time. Grant them the joy of love and companionship and also the gifts of patience and the ability to forgive.

Lord of love, **in your mercy hear us.**

Jesus, as you healed Peter's mother-in-law, bring courage and hope to those who care for those who are ill: those with untreatable conditions, those with special needs and those unable to care for themselves. In a moment of quiet we remember all who need our prayers today....

Lord of love, **in your mercy hear us.**

Jesus, when you were dying you called Mary and John to care for one another: comfort today all those who grieving the loss of loved ones. We pray for the souls of Ken Akers, Margaret Hodges and Jackie Karas, and for Michael Flinter who died suddenly in New York. In love we pray for Lily Goddard and Barbara Elsworth Jones whose memorials fall this coming week.

Lord of love, **in your mercy hear us.**

Jesus, as you ate breakfast on the beach with your disciples, unite the whole family of the Church, living and departed, so that with Mary the Mother of God, St James St Peter, and all your saints, we may enjoy your presence at the eternal feast in your heavenly Kingdom. Merciful Father, **accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Notices

Blessing

May God give us his love and his peace,
his light and his joy,
in this world and in the next;
and may the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with us, now and for ever. Amen.



May God bless every £1 we give so that St James' will be here, not just for today and for tomorrow, but for the future he wants to create.