

Saint Mary's Newsletter: February

Vicar: David Smithson 021 985530 Fridays

07 8492761 Afterhours

Peoples Warden: Sally-Ann Riddell 07 8243850

Vicars Warden: John Heaton 07 8243996



SERVICES FOR FEBRUARY

Sunday 2nd:

10am Candlemas family communion Service

Refreshments: Sally-Ann Riddell

Readings: Sally-Ann Riddell

Sunday 9th:

10am Family Communion

Refreshments:

Readings:

Intercessions:

Sunday 16th:

10am Family Communion

Refreshments:

Readings:

Intercessions:

Sunday 23rd:

10am Harvest Service & Family Communion

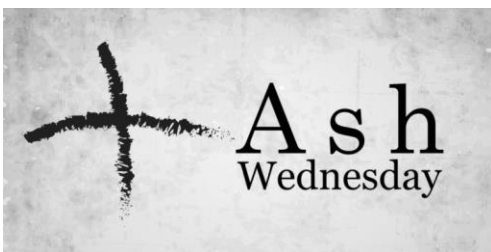
Refreshments: Trish Smithson

Readings: Trish Smithson

Intercessions: Trish Smithson

Wednesday 26th:

7:30pm Ash Weds Service



Refreshment Roster:

Please see the roster on the table near the church entrance, and fill in the spaces / dates that you can provide after service morning tea.

Harvest Service: Sunday 23rd A celebration of God's provision to us, and to use this as an opportunity to help those who are less fortunate. So please bring along non perishable food that will be given to the Food Bank.



Ash Weds: Weds 26th March at 7:30pm. The service marks the beginning of Lent and involves the burning of last year's palm Sunday crosses and the marking of your forehead with ash to signify our mortality as well as repentance.

Children/Youth:

Kids activity packs with a choccy treat, and youth: Friday's 7pm @ Oaks church, Gordonton, & Weds 7pm "Ignite" @ Horsham Downs Church.

"Is God's love conditional or unconditional?"

God's love for mankind, as described in the Bible, is clearly unconditional in that His love is expressed toward the objects of His love despite their disposition toward Him. In other words, God loves without placing any conditions on the loved ones; He loves because it is His nature to love (1 John 4:8). That love moves Him toward benevolent action: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). The unconditional nature of God's love is most clearly seen in the gospel. The gospel message is basically a story of divine rescue. As God considered the plight of His rebellious people, He determined to save them from their sin, and this determination was based on His love (Ephesians 1:4–5). Listen to the apostle Paul's words from his letter to the Romans:

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6–8).

Reading through the book of Romans, we learn that we are alienated from God due to our sin. We are at enmity with God, and His wrath is being revealed against the ungodly for their unrighteousness (Romans 1:18–20). We reject God, and God gives us over to our sin. We also learn that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23) and that none of us seek God; none of us do what is right before His eyes (Romans 3:10–18).

Despite the hostility and enmity we have toward God (for which God would be perfectly just to utterly destroy us), God revealed His love toward us in the giving of His Son, Jesus Christ, as the propitiation (the appeasement of God's righteous wrath) for our sins. God did not wait for us to better ourselves as a condition of atoning for our sin. Rather, God condescended to become a man and live among His people (John 1:14). God experienced our humanity—everything it means to be a human being—and then offered Himself willingly as a substitutionary atonement for our sin.

This divine rescue, based on unconditional love, resulted in a gracious act of self-sacrifice. As Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). That is precisely what God, in Christ, has done. The unconditional nature of God's love is made clear in other passages of Scripture:

"But 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).

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:9–10).

It is important to note that God's love is a love that initiates; it is never a response. That is precisely what makes it unconditional. If God's love were conditional, then we would have to do something to earn or merit it. We would have to somehow appease His wrath or cleanse ourselves of sin before God would be able to love us. But that is not the biblical message. The biblical message—the gospel—is that God, motivated by love, moved unconditionally to save His people from their sin.

Also important is the fact that God's unconditional love does not mean that everyone will be saved (see Matthew 25:46). Nor does it mean that God will never discipline His children. To ignore God's merciful love, to reject the Saviour who bought us (2 Peter 2:1), is to subject ourselves to God's wrath for eternity (Romans 1:18), not His love. For a child of God to wilfully disobey God is to invite the Father's correction (Hebrews 12:5–11).

Does God love everyone? Yes, He shows mercy and kindness to all. In that sense His love is unconditional. Does God love Christians in a different way than He loves non-Christians? Yes. Because believers have exercised faith in God's Son, they are saved. The unconditional, merciful love God has for everyone should bring us to faith, receiving with gratefulness the conditional, covenant love He grants those who receive Jesus as their Saviour.



This Month in Christian History:



Saint Brigid was born Brigit. There is much debate over her birthparents, but it is widely believed her mother was Brocca, a Christian baptized by Saint Patrick, and her father was Dubthach, a Leinster chieftain. Brocca was a slave, therefore Brigit was born into slavery.

When Dubthach's wife discovered Brocca was pregnant, she was sold to a Druid landowner. It is not clear if Brocca was unable to produce milk or was not present to care for Brigit, but legend states Brigit vomited any food the druid attempted to feed her, as he was impure, so a white cow with red ears sustained her instead.

Many stories of Brigit's purity followed her childhood. She was unable to keep from feeding the poor and healing them.

When she was about ten-years-old, Brigit was returned to her father's home, as he was her legal master. Her charity did not end when she left her mother, and she donated his possessions to anyone who asked.

Eventually, Dubthach became tired of her charitably nature and took her to the king of Leinster, with the intention of selling her. As he spoke to the king, Brigit gave his jewelled sword to a beggar so he could barter it for food for his family. When the king, who was a Christian, saw this, he recognized her heart and convinced Dubthach to grant her freedom by saying, "Her merit before God is greater than ours."

After being freed, Brigit returned to the Druid and her mother, who was in charge of the Druid's dairy. Brigit took over and often gave away milk, but the dairy prospered despite the charitable practice, and the Druid eventually freed Brocca.

Brigid then returned to Dubthach, who had arranged for her to marry a bard. She refused and made a vow to always be chaste. Legend has it Brigit prayed that her beauty be taken so no one would want to marry her, and the prayer was granted. It was not until after she made her final vows that her beauty was restored.

Little is known about Saint Brigid's life after she entered the Church, but in 40 she founded a monastery in Kildare, called the Church of the Oak. It was built above a pagan shrine, which was beneath a large oak tree.

Brigid and seven friends organized communal consecrated religious life for women in Ireland and she founded two monastic institutions, one for men and one for women. Brigit invited a hermit called Conleth to help her in Kildare as a spiritual pastor. She later founded a school of art that included metalwork and illumination, which Conleth led as well. It was at this school that the Book of Kildare, which the Gerald of Wales praised as "the work of angelic, and not human skill," was beautifully illuminated, but was lost three centuries ago. Saint Brigid helped many people in her lifetime, but on February 1 525, she passed away of natural causes. Her body was initially kept to the right of the high altar of Kildare Cathedral, with a tomb "adorned with gems and precious stones and crowns of gold and silver," but in 878, during the Viking raids, her relics were moved to the tomb of Patrick and Columba.