

**St Swithun's Church Family
Sunday before Lent &
St. Valentine's Day**



**14th February 2021
10am Zoom**

**Or use this booklet to join
together with us in Spirit**

*Please use this booklet to **worship with us** on zoom at 10am – or read through this service knowing that we are joining our prayers together in Spirit.*

Create a sacred space – if possible gather a candle and a cross if you can find them. You could light your candles throughout the worship to represent the light we celebrate at Candlemas.

The children might like to use the Sunday school resources provided by Izzy.

In addition we will be audio recording today's sermon which will be uploaded to the website www.saintswithuns.org.uk

There are various prayer resources and other things to look at on the website – if you have any feedback or anything to share please let me know.

Giving - if you usually give your collection on a Sunday morning in cash, and you are able to, please put this aside each week to bring to church when you are next able to. Even better would be to set up your giving online ('Saint Swithun's PCC' ; 60-05-11 ; 16126718 ; NatWest Bank) if you haven't already done this.

You might like to enhance your worship by singing or listening to a hymn or a song at various points – I have a few suggestions below – you tube is a great resource...

**Great is thy faithfulness
All are welcome in this place
Love divine all loves excelling
All my hope on God is founded**

<https://youtu.be/0k1WhFtVp0o>

<https://youtu.be/js8RtT0mJpc>

<https://youtu.be/igs3mNsppsI>

<https://youtu.be/W3LCGh02Vew>

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www.saintswithuns.org.uk

Introduction

Today is the last Sunday before Lent and it is also St. Valentine's Day – a day celebrating romantic love. St. Valentine was actually two people (who weren't romantically involved).

Both were martyred on the same day (c. 270). Feasts commemorating them were celebrated on February 14th. However the origin of Valentine traditions is not thought to have any connection with the martyred saints. Rather it comes from an early European belief that the second week of February was when birds began to mate. The idea suggests that lovers should probably exchange notes and gifts on February 14th in conjunction with what nature practiced.

As Christians, we know that love originates from God and that God is love (1 John 4:16). Today in our worship may we know that we are loved – and may this love change us as we prepare to journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter.

The Gathering

The Greeting

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you



Prayers of preparation

1 John 4:16

And we ourselves know and believe the love
which God has for us.

God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God
and God lives in union with them.

Let us worship God together

**Knowing that we are in the presence of
God's perfect love.**

Amen.

Prayers of Penitence

Loving God, we find a home in you; we find a family in you;
we find a place to belong; we find a space to be known;
to love and be loved.

We are sorry that in times of distance
we too easily forget this gift and all that it brings;
we have forgotten our place, and doubted your love;
remind us, and all who feel neglected by you,
that we can find life in abundance in you.

Lord, have mercy; **Lord, have mercy**

We are sorry that in these difficult and stressful times
all too often we have forgotten who we are,
and we have failed to care for ourselves;
remind us, and all who feel worthless,
that you call us by name.

Christ, have mercy; **Christ, have mercy.**

We are sorry that in our times of isolation
we can forget our connectedness
and instead feel our division instead of our unity;
remind us, and all who exclude, oppress and condemn others,
that we are all made in your image, we are all one body.

Lord, have mercy; **Lord, have mercy.**

The Absolution

God forgives you. Forgive others. Forgive yourself.
Be at peace. **Amen**

Glory to God

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to all people on earth.

Rejoice knowing that God loves us,
liberates us and makes us whole.

Today we will name things we love
about:

- 1) Ourselves
- 2) Someone we love
- 3) Our church
- 4) Our community



The Liturgy of the Word

The Collect

Christ our only true light,
before whose bright cloud
your friends fell to the ground;
as we turn towards the cross
may we embrace your love
and act passionately for your justice
in your name.

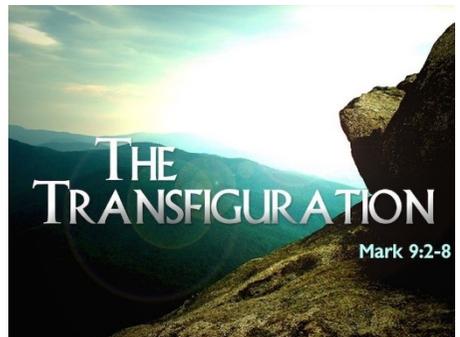
Amen

Gospel Reading *Mark 9.2-9*

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark
Glory to you, O Lord.

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

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



Sermon *Mother Juliet*

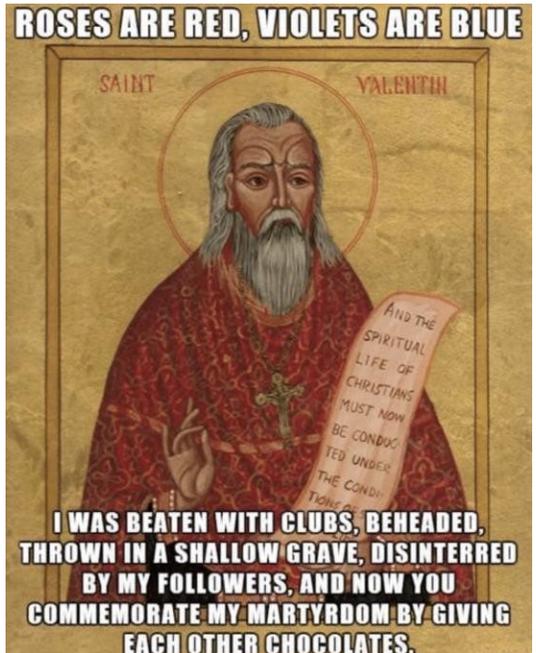
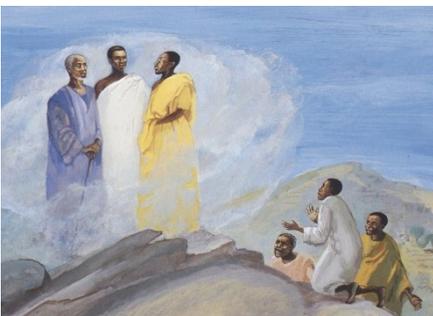
First let me wish you a happy Valentine's day. I know its terribly commercialised and all that – but I can't help liking a day to celebrate lurrvvve...

It seems unlikely that today's celebration of romantic love has much to do with the one or two martyred bishops called Valentine from early Christianity. This image sums up why this is unlikely....



folk of the past believed that birds started to get frisky. All I can say is with all this snowy and icy weather this week – I hope our feathered friends are not turned off!

Whatever your experience of romantic love today – rather brilliantly - we have another reminder that we are beloved...



It seems much more likely that we celebrate romance today because the feast of St Valentine coincided with the day on which

folk of the past believed that birds started to get frisky. All I can say is with all this snowy and icy weather this week – I hope our feathered friends are not turned off!

Whatever your experience of romantic love today – rather brilliantly - we have another reminder that we are beloved...

In addition to being St. Valentine's day today it is also the last Sunday before Lent and the Gospel reading from Mark that we have just heard, is an account of the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus went up on a mountain to pray and he took with him three of his closest

disciples - Peter, James and John. While Jesus was praying his appearance changed and his clothes became dazzling white – I love the added description – such as no one on earth could bleach them. Proper whiter than white whiteness... glowy stuff. Reminds me of the snow earlier in the week – starts all glowy and then becomes a bit sludgy ... but that first snow dazzliness is what we are reminded of....

Apart from washing powder adverts does this description of dazzling whiteness link you to any other dazzling white descriptions you can think of?



One of the things I was reminded of (probably because of the delights of this week's snow in my mind at the moment) was the angels who appeared after the resurrection - Matt 28:2 'His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were as white as snow'.

Of course this doesn't mean that Jesus was an angel but it points our minds forward towards the events of the resurrection and, of course, to the divine nature of Jesus.

At the transfiguration - we also have Moses and Elijah joining the party - also shining in glory and speaking to Jesus about what he was soon to do in Jerusalem. Of course both Moses and Elijah were hugely important figures in Judaism and it is interesting that their appearance with Jesus gives him this link to Jewish heritage authority but we are also pointed to Jesus going beyond that authority – as we hear the voice of God saying to Jesus – 'this is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!'

Only last month we remembered how Jesus - and all of us through baptism - are beloved as we explored Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan.



Today we hear it again – beloved... such a lovely and profoundly important thing to remember that we are beloved on this national day of love... red roses and cards are nice – I love it all – but this kind of deep love, beloved-ness is cause for celebration every day. We are all beloved.

So this slightly crazy story and wonderful snowy white imaged story of the transfiguration points us forward to Jesus' resurrection and gives us a flavour of his divine nature, and it also reminds us of his baptism. This story also tells us that Jesus is both connected with the Jewish tradition and yet is something entirely new that goes beyond Moses and Elijah.

The transfiguration is a point of change – a connection with the old and the traditional and the movement towards the new... Which is probably why it is the chosen reading for the Sunday before Lent. The point at which we are all getting ready to keep Lent in some way.

I love that today the Sunday before Lent is also Valentine's Day – this day of love – because it is a day to remember again that we are beloved. As we think about this transfiguration – it is important to remember that it is love which changes us – love from our creation and our beginning and love as we journey towards new birth and new life – love – God's love transfigures us, God's love changes us.

So we are now looking towards Lent – this week we have Ash Wednesday (we will have a short zoom service at 8pm if any

want to join us) – and we will be starting together our Lenten pilgrimage to Easter. The point of any pilgrimage is not just to arrive at the destination, but also to engage with the process of change along the way. As Christians we are always moving and in constant process ... we tread the path of constantly aligning ourselves with God's love.

What will your Lenten action be I wonder?



Lent should not be about self-punishment self-hatred and denial – it is about being profoundly and deeply loved – beloved. Lent is about aligning ourselves in God's love – so what beautiful and lovely thing can you do this Lent to feel that you are beloved and valued and precious... it doesn't necessarily mean it should be easy – sacrifice if done well and with loving intention can bring about incredible transformation. Just think about the wonderful world of health and fitness – it's a gift to make yourself feel good and healthy – but it isn't necessarily easy...

Loving ourselves can mean giving up things we like because it helps us to be more healthy in body mind and soul... If giving up chocolate connects you to feeling beloved of God and draws you closer to God's love - and helps you to show yourself how lovely you are in God's image – then it is indeed a good Lenten discipline – however if it is simply a punishment for enjoying the sweet stuff – then it is definitely not a good idea.

I hope that you can reflect on something for Lent that is profoundly loving – something new or stopping something that is harmful or helps you reflect more about yourself, your community. Whatever we choose to do – we need to actively change as we journey with God. What can you do to draw closer to God's love day by day, remembering that we are all beloved.

Amen

Affirmation of faith

**We believe in God,
Creator of the world and of all people;
and in Jesus Christ, incarnate among us,
Word and Wisdom, who died and rose again;
and in the Holy Spirit, present with us,
to guide, strengthen, and comfort.
We believe, God, help our unbelief.
Amen.**

Prayers

Let us pray that we will be awakened to God's glory.

Loving God, we pray that the glory of your presence may fill our lives and be reflected in all that we do. As we approach Lent may we as a church be radiant with your glory, so that the gospel is evident and not veiled despite our locked-down lives. We pray that as a church family we will show your love to ourselves and to each other and share our faith with those we encounter.

Loving God: **fill us with your glory.**

We pray for those who bring goodness to our world... We pray for those places in our world ravaged with danger and lacking hope – we pray for the ongoing pandemic and for swift vaccines and healing. We pray for those places encountering conflict and oppression....

Help us to love others as you love us.

Loving God: **fill us with your glory.**

Jesus reminds us to love one another as we are loved. We pray for all those whose lives are weighed down with difficulties. For any known to us who need light to shine into their lives. For - Fran and family, Lamar, Maureen, Karen, Paulette and their families, Andy and family, Philbert and family, Catherine and Alfrina and family, Betty, Canon Richard, Martin, Rossy and family, Kevin, Gwen, Pamela, Neil, Debbie, Elaine and family, Clinton, Francis, Cynthia, Diane, Harold, Ivy, Sean, Taneisha, Talabi, Susan, Edith, Vanda, Lorna, Ena and Stephen.

Loving God: **fill us with your glory.**

Loving God, we remember all those who are now in eternal light -
Carl, Gloria, Alan, Joseph, Sydney, Simone and John.
Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord
And let light perpetual shine upon them

Merciful God
**Accept these prayers,
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray as Jesus taught us:
**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.**

The Peace

Jesus said,
"Peace I leave with you,
my own peace I give to you."
The Peace of God
be always with you!
And also with you.



The Notices

- *Wednesday is Ash Wednesday – there will be a short zoom service at 8pm. We will be invited to impose ashes at this service – if you would like to make ash – use your palm cross from last year. Dry it out in the oven for a while and then set fire to it somewhere safe... You will have a very small amount of ash then for your imposition – alternatively pick some ash up from the vicarage (or if we can we will try to deliver let us know to arrange).*
- *Happy Birthday to all those who have a birthday this week – especially Patrice who is 21 today...*



Dismissal and Blessing

The Blessing

May God bless us;
may God keep us in the Spirit's care
and lead our lives with love.

May Christ's warm welcome
shine from our hearts
and Christ's own peace
prevail through this and everyday.

And the blessing of God
Creator, Redeemer, Spirit
be with us always.

Amen.

The Dismissal

God is love.
May we abide in this love.

Today.
Always.

Amen.

