

Q. Who was St. Valentine?

Valentine's Day has become popular and lucrative because it is a celebration of romantic love, a time in which men and women can prove how much they value their significant other, often by investing in roses and dinners and greeting cards, all of which have been jacked up in price in order to capitalize on the pressure of the holiday. For this reason, Valentine's has also been somewhat maligned, not only by those who don't have a 'sweetheart' when the 14th rolls around, but also by those in committed relationships who are revolting against an event seen as far too commercialized and robbed of meaning for the sake of sentimentality.

Interestingly, Valentine's has its roots in the early witness of Christianity, with absolutely no reference to romantic love. Named not just for one saint, but possibly as many as three, each St. Valentine was a martyr – choosing death rather than renouncing their proclamation that Jesus is Lord. It was not until the high Middle Ages, and the obsession with courtly love, that somehow Valentine's and romance became linked. The stories of Valentine, (we actually know very little about any of the St. Valentines) were embellished and glossed with St. Valentine becoming re-cast as a romance-ally – a priest who secretly performed marriages of Roman soldiers who had been forced to be celibate by the emperor's belief that sexually-frustrated men were better in battle.

Jesus tells his friends on the night before his death, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35). Because Valentine's Day actually falls on a Sunday this year, we have an opportunity as a community to celebrate this special date in a way that is closer to its original Christian premise – a marking of how we, as followers of Jesus, can bear witness to, and participate in, the compassionate, other-centred love at the heart of this Gospel command.

Today, we have the opportunity to gather together in worship and prayer and thanksgiving.

Today, we celebrate the blessing of baby Ryu, welcomed into the family of Reverend Scott and therefore into our St. George's family as well. We have planned a special "baby party" for Ryu after the 10am service.

And today, we support our Refugee Sponsorship Project through a Skating Party fundraiser at Ridley College at 1:30pm.

These are a few of the opportunities on order in our St. George's celebration of Valentine's Day 2016. I pray that each of you will make a point today of finding creative and generous ways of sharing God's love – not just with the friends and family closest to your heart, but with the people we don't yet know, to whom we do yet feel connected, and yet who in the mystery of God's love are our brothers and sisters!

