

10th August 2025 – Morning Service

Keep going in faith

Rev Andrew Roberts

Much of the material in this service is taken from material I wrote for this Sunday for Roots for Worship

Introduction

Today's epistle reading from Hebrews is part of a chapter on acts of faith by God's people. It focuses on Abraham, who trusted God's call to leave his home and become a nomad. He and Sarah had no child and no home for many years, but their commitment to God's promise was unwavering.

Sometimes faith seems to come easily (see this week's psalm). At other times it is tough (Abraham and Sarah were blessed with a baby – many faithful couples are not). Today we explore how the gifts of Scripture, prayer and the stories of others can help us and those we pray for to keep going in faith.

A gathering prayer based on Psalm 33 from Roots for Worship

Lord, our souls wait for you,
our hearts are glad in you.
When we trust in your holy name,
let your love be upon us anew,
as we hope in you
and worship you this day.

Amen.

StF 186 – Tell out my soul

(The song of Mary but it fits well with Sarah's story too)

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| 1) Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of his word.
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice. | 3) Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high. |
| 2) Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm
has done
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His holy name - the Lord, the Mighty One. | 4) Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and for evermore! |

Timothy Dudley-Smith © Timothy Dudley-Smith

Prayer of Adoration

Steadfast God,
we praise you for the precious gift of faith,
which gives substance to our hopes,
draws us on towards your kingdom
and unites us
as we journey together
through all the ups-and-downs of life.
In you we trust, faithful Trinity,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

We are sorry, gracious God,
for the fragility of our faith,
which waivers when things get tough,
wobbles when confidence gets low,
gives up when the road gets steep,
loses sight of how far you have brought us
and forgets that you are there by our side.
Please forgive us, bolster us,
empower us and use us
to build up the faith of others.
We ask this in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Eternal God, your faith in us doesn't waiver,
your love for us doesn't wane;
your trust never flickers;
your grace never fails.

And so, with thankful hearts, we receive your forgiveness
and go forward in faith, in your strength and with your blessing.

Amen.

StF 2 – Come let us sing to the One

1) Come, let us sing to the One,
To the Father of life,
Whose light fills the earth like the sun;
Come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Great is the world he has made,
Are the myst'ries untold,
Is his measureless power of old;
Come, come let us sing to our God.

*Ch) To our God, who is able
To strengthen us in his grace
Beyond all we imagine,
Be all glory and praise,
Be all praise.*

2) Come, let us sing to the One,
To the Saviour of life,
Find the fullness of God in the Son;
Come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Wild is the mercy of Christ,
Is the richness of grace,
Is the unending life we embrace;
Come, come let us sing to our God.

3) Come, let us sing to the One, to the Spirit of life,
Leading us in the way of the Son;
Come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Strong is the Spirit within, is the boldness to speak,
Is the power to run when we're weak;
Come, come let us sing to our God.

Keith & Kristyn Getty © 2003 Thankyou Music

Offering

StF 28 – Jesus calls us here to meet him

1) Jesus calls us here to meet him
As, through word and song and prayer,
We affirm God's promised presence
Where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
Praise the Son who calls us friends;
Praise the Spirit who, among us,
To our hopes and fears attends.

2) Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of life and Lord of all,
Sharer of our flesh and frailness,
Saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
Tell his tales that all may hear;
Tell the world that Christ in glory
Came to earth to meet us here.

3) Jesus calls us to each other,
Vastly different though we are;
Creed and colour, class and gender
Neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
Join the hands of age and youth;
Join the faithful and the doubter
In their common search for truth.

John L Bell & Graham Maule © 1989 WGRG Iona Community

Reading: Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Reading: Luke 12: 32-34

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Address

The letter to the Hebrews was written for people who were in danger of starting to lose interest in Jesus. It is possible that some were becoming disillusioned with faith because of personal issues. Most of the previous chapters deliberately remind people of how wonderful Jesus is – in particular, that he is the real high priest (compared with the shadows and copies on this earth; Hebrews 4:14-15).

In Luke 12:32-34, Jesus is addressing his committed followers. These are honest words that clearly recognise some of the challenges they will face and wise words that urge trust in God the Father. As with the Hebrews passage, this text is a good starting point for an honest exploration of difficulties we are likely to, and do face as disciples of Jesus and the everyday challenge of keeping on going in faith.

Let's reflect a bit more on the Hebrews passage. Chapter 11 of the letter is an encouragement to keep on believing and to keep on going in faith. Abraham and Sarah are held up as exemplars of people who kept going in faith when the odds seemed to be stacked against them. The writer draws on Genesis 15:1-6 and the promise of an heir for Abram and Sarai (as they were then called), from whom descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky will come.

It is an inspiring story and has been an encouragement to many who have struggled, not least with the acute pain of childlessness, to keep on going in faith. There are many people who can testify to the joy of having their prayers answered against the odds, often having walked very painful pathways. [Michelle Obama in her book *Becoming*](#) tells of the struggles she and Barack had in conceiving and the pain they went through before their two daughters were born – daughters that brought them untold joy.

Such stories should be rightly celebrated but, alongside that, there is an ever-present need to be sensitive to and supportive of those whose stories do not have the hoped-for ending. [Sheridan Voysey's book *Resurrection Year*](#) helpfully shares how he and his wife Merryn coped with this. After ten years of tear-soaked prayers and repeatedly dashed hopes, Sheridan and Merryn came to the heart-breaking conclusion that their dream of having a child was over. Voysey chronicles the couple's return to life. From the streets of Rome to the Basilicas of Paris, from the Alps of Switzerland to their new home in Oxford, Voysey and his wife begin the healing process while wrestling with their doubts about God's goodness. Voysey's story is beautiful, uplifting, and deeply thoughtful, assuring us that even after the most shattered of dreams can come wonderful, invigorating new life. The writer to the Hebrews is refreshingly honest about these sorts of scenarios. In verse 13, he speaks of those who 'died in faith without having received the promises'.

The need to keep going in faith is not just important in the context of longing for a child. It is important in all manner of contexts. Undergoing medical treatment, caring for dependent loved ones, maintaining a business and the employment that goes with it in trying times. When I worked for a Christian charity, the charity faced significant financial pressures. At one point we were one month away from not being able to pay the staff. I will always remember literally kneeling on the kitchen floor praying intensely for the funds necessary to arrive. Keeping going in faith was a real challenge. The funds did arrive and we were able to raise an additional £100,000 to return the charity to a sustainable situation.

Why some prayers are apparently answered and others are not will always be a mystery on this earth. But, as the writer of Hebrews reminds us, this earth is not the only reality, for there is also a better place – a heavenly one; a place where every tear will be wiped away and all will be made whole. This vision is offered as an encouragement to keep on going both to those who struggle and to those who don't. One day all things will be made new but in the meantime the need for a better country, a heavenly one, here on earth is all too apparent.

We keep on going in faith not just for our own blessing and benefit but on behalf of others who long for peace, for justice (think of [Mr Bates vs the Post Office](#)), for freedom; on behalf of those clinging on to their faith and needing to know that God has not abandoned them. As the theologian Alistair McGrath puts it: *'The true believer is not someone who disengages with the world in order to focus on heaven, but someone who tries to make the world more like heaven'*. (Alistair McGrath, *The Landscape of Faith*, SPCK, p236).

Every week we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. Where might that prayer be particularly urgent today? How might we be part of the answer to that prayer? And who do we know whose heart might be breaking at this time and need someone to help them keep on believing, keep on going?

When we pray and care for and in such situations, we can be assured that 'God is not ashamed to be called our God' (Hebrews 11:16). May it be so. Amen.

StF 707 – Make me a channel of your peace

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| 1) Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
And where there's doubt, true faith in you: | 2) Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light;
And where there's sadness, ever joy: |
| Ch) <i>O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.</i> | 3) Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving unto all that we receive,
And in dying that we're born to eternal life. |

Sebastian Temple © 1967 OCP Publications

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, help us to see beyond the earthly things

To where you are at work in our world.

Lord, we come to you in the stillness now, aware that we are so small in a world full of problems and pain. We feel helpless when we watch the news, but we come to you knowing that you are much greater than anything we can ask or imagine. We know that you are a God of compassion and mercy. We come, therefore, seeking your heart as we open our hearts to you.

Lord, help us to see beyond the earthly things

To where you are at work in our world.

Lord, we pray for the Middle East. Our news bulletins are full of the Gaza crisis. We cry out to you, asking for you to have mercy on all the people in Gaza who are starving. We pray that humanitarian agencies will have the freedom to distribute aid where it is most needed. We remember, too, the hostages and those awaiting their return. Lord, the whole situation seems impossible to fix. We cannot see the answer, but you know the bigger picture. So we pray that you will speak into the hearts and minds of world leaders, enabling them to bring this conflict and suffering to an end. We pray that peace will reign in the land where you walked. And in amongst all the suffering, help us to see where you are working: the kindness of those who care for the sick and wounded, the determination of those who are working for a peaceful solution, the love that is shared between families and friends.

Lord, help us to see beyond the earthly things

To where you are at work in our world.

Lord, we pray for all those affected by the earthquake and tsunami. Lord, you are the God of creation. Yet we know that sometimes even the earth does not behave as you ordered. We long for when your reign of order and peace will be restored.

Lord, help us to see beyond the earthly things

To where you are at work in our world.

Lord, we pray for our nation. We pray for places where there have been industrial disputes, strikes or civil unrest. We ask that negotiators be people of wisdom, looking to the common good.

We pray for our schools, many of which are now closed for the holidays. We pray for rest for teachers and pupils. Thank you for the gift of education. We pray for those places in the world where it is denied, particularly to girls. Help them find ways of learning...

We pray for the holiday clubs, camps and missions running in the summer. We pray that they may be places of safety, joy and fun. Make yourself known to those who attend... maybe through the beauty of the world around them, the kindness of leaders and the stories from your word. May our children become curious to know who you are. And may they return to school enthused with the knowledge that they have met you, who knows everything about them and loves them beyond measure. May your kingdom come, here in our nation.

Lord, help us to see beyond the earthly things

To where you are at work in our world.

Lord, we pray for those we know who are sick, troubled, or sad. Help us to bring them your deep comfort and consolation. Be closer to them than we can imagine. Hold them in your loving arms. Help them to glimpse something of you through their tears. Thank you that you are not a God who stands aloof but who sought to live amongst us and share our pains and joys.

Lord, help us to see beyond the earthly things

To where you are at work in our world.

Lord, we think now of our own community. We thank you for the people who live around us. We pause to pray for our neighbours and friends...

Help us to bring the good news of your kingdom into the area where we live. Nowhere is out of the reach of your love, and you have inspired us to take that love to others. We think about where we have been over the past week. Where did we see you at work? Maybe in a job well done, the smile of a friend, a hurdle overcome....

We look forward to the week ahead. We bring our plans to you and picture some of the people we may meet. Help us to see you standing with us in the meetings, playing with us in the playgrounds, walking with us and serving with us. Help us to see you reflected in the eyes of everyone we meet. May that lead us to a deeper understanding of our shared humanity.

Lord, help us to see beyond the earthly things

To where you are at work in our world.

Lord, help us to go transformed by your love today. May we have the eyes to see where you are leading us and the wisdom to follow. Even when we can't clearly see the road ahead, give us the courage to step out in faith, knowing that you want the best for us, even if we don't always understand. Help us to see the needs of others with a new vision. Teach us to love our friends, colleagues and neighbours with the deep, challenging love that stems from your heart. Take us forwards as a congregation to share your love more widely in our local community. And when we are flagging, raise our eyes to look to you for inspiration and strength, knowing that you go before us and will walk alongside.

Lord, help us to see beyond the earthly things

To where you are at work in our world.

Help us walk in step with you and return rejoicing next week to share in the wonders of your love. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 699 – God of justice, Saviour to all

1) God of justice, Saviour to all,
came to rescue the weak and the poor;
chose to serve and not be served.
Jesus, you have called us.
Freely we've received, now freely we will give.

2) To act justly every day,
loving mercy in every way,
walking humbly before you, God.
You have shown us what you require.
Freely we've received, now freely we will give.

*Ch) We must go, live to feed the hungry,
stand beside the broken, we must go.
Stepping forward, keep us from just singing,
move us into action, we must go.*

*Br) Fill us up and send us out,
fill us up and send us out,
fill us up and send us out, Lord.*

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A sending out prayer

As you go, may the God of Abraham and Sarah go with you.
May you be ready to meet Jesus whenever he comes to you,
and may you know yourself held within the love of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**