

# 5<sup>th</sup> March 2023 – Morning Service

Rev Michael Payne

## Call to Worship

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.' (Genesis 12:1)

Step out of the past and step into the safety of God today.

Come, worship, step in line with God's people today.

## Prayer

Lord you are our God, the God of the known and the unknown. You are present with us; make us evermore aware of your presence. You call us ever deeper into a relationship with you. This day may we be made ready to journey with faith, to journey into challenge, and to journey for your kingdom's glory. **Amen**

## StF 32 – Meet and right it is to sing

- 1) Meet and right it is to sing,  
In every time and place,  
Glory to our heavenly King,  
The God of truth and grace:  
join we then with sweet accord,  
All in one thanksgiving join;  
Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
Eternal praise be thine.
- 2) Thee the first-born sons of light,  
In choral symphonies,  
Praise by day, day without night,  
And never, never cease;  
Angels and archangels all  
Praise the mystic Three in One  
Sing, and stop, and gaze, and fall  
O'erwhelmed before thy throne.
- 3) Vying with that happy choir,  
Who chant thy praise above,  
We on eagles' wings aspire,  
The wings of faith and love:  
Thee they sing with glory crowned,  
We extol the slaughtered Lamb, -  
Lower if our voices sound,  
Our subject is the same.
- 4) Father, God, thy love we praise,  
Which gave thy Son to die;  
Jesus, full of truth and grace,  
Alike we glorify;  
Spirit, Comforter divine,  
Praise by all to thee be given;  
Till we in full chorus join,  
And earth is turned to heaven.

*Charles Wesley*

## Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God, you are all powerful. You are truth and beyond comparison and defining. You are Present in all things, yet without limit. You are beyond change yet a source of change for us. Eternal and timeless, you are experience by us in what we call time. You are a God of light and life, invisible, yet you make yourself known to us in Creation, in Jesus and by the presence of your Holy Spirit. You are found by all who seek you with their whole heart. You are the God of Israel and of all who hope in Christ. You are our God and we adore you.

In a moment of Silence, aware of God and his being we pause and reflect upon who we are. [*Silence....*]

God of grace and mercy, we depend on those of your qualities that we may approach you in worship. We are a people often self-focused, often resistant to change, often hiding from the needs of others accept our confession of self, transform us by your Spirit evermore into the likeness of Christ that we may walk his way, show his love and bring glory to you in our words, thoughts and deeds. **Amen**

Lord Jesus open our ears that we may hear your words of grace spoken deep into our being;- "Your sins are forgiven." We give thanks to Jesus. **Amen**

## Reading: Genesis 12:1-4a - The Call of Abram

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

## StF 338 – There is a redeemer

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| 1) There is a Redeemer,<br>Jesus, God's own Son.<br>Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,<br>Holy One.                                | 2) Jesus my Redeemer,<br>Name above all names,<br>Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,<br>O for sinners slain.         |
| Ch) <i>Thank You, O my Father,<br/>For giving us Your Son,<br/>And leaving Your Spirit till<br/>The work on earth is done.</i> | 3) When I stand in glory<br>I will see His face,<br>And there I'll serve my King for ever<br>In that holy place. |

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## Reading: John 3:1-17 - Nicodemus Visits Jesus

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.'

## Reading: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 - The Example of Abraham

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

### **StF 481 – The Lord's my shepherd**

1) The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;  
He makes me lie in pastures green,  
He leads me by the still, still waters,  
His goodness restores my soul.

*Ch) And I will trust in you alone,  
And I will trust in you alone,  
For your endless mercy follows me,  
Your goodness will lead me home.*

2) He guides my ways in righteousness,  
And he anoints my head with oil;  
And my cup - it overflows with joy,  
I feast on his pure delights.

3) And though I walk the darkest path -  
I will not fear the evil one,  
For you are with me, and your rod and staff  
Are the comfort I need to know.

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### **Sermon**

Do you have a birth certificate? When I was working in Newport, South Wales I led over 200 wedding services. Couple often would ask me if I needed to see their birth certificate before I would perform their wedding service. I said I assumed that they had been born because they were sitting in front of me. The Registrars would have the records to check when needed.

Each of us, by the very fact that you are reading or listening to this has been born. We cannot remember our birth and therefore we do not speak much about it. Our mothers may have told us something of the time but our knowledge is second hand. What is more important is what has happened since that day. In our journey with God, when we are asked about our faith journey it is so easy, for some, to speak about the date, time and place of coming to faith, being born again as some would term it. Often that is what is told when people are asked to share their "testimony." That is all well and good, but what has happened since? What experiences have we gone through with our "God Family" to grow and develop, or have we just stayed as new-born babies in faith?

As I look back over nearly 50 years of following Jesus, how have I grown in faith? What have I been asked to do for, and by, God? What adventures have I had that I would not have otherwise experienced? What challenges have been surmounted through trusting God which if I just trusted myself I would not have started?

Abr(ah)am was challenged to go on an adventure journey. "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." How would you have responded? God added a promise. "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." At the time Abram was not a spring-chicken, I better be careful here, he is declared to be 75 years old at the time. Would you get up and go at such a request? If someone offered you an opportunity to start a new, better life tomorrow, the other side of the world, how would you respond?

In years gone by people were offered the £10 ticket to Australia to start a new life, do you know anyone who made the journey? In later times there was a Television programme called "Wanted down Under?" People had the opportunity to go and visit Australia or New Zealand to see what it would be like to live there. Almost 'try before you buy'. Abram had no such a time of trying he set forth and trusted. Around the world there are the Asylum seekers of today; the refugees from lands far away, wanting to take a risk for a new life, a "better" life.

Nicodemus was a devout man of faith but an adventure with Jesus was a big challenge. Jesus challenged him to start afresh, to be born again, born from above, born of God's spirit. Nicodemus had many questions to ask of Jesus. He wanted answers to his questions before taking the step.

Are we good at trying new things? Do you try new types of Food? New experiences? I remember when Anita and I were in Peru trekking one day we were offered some fruit. A type of Granadilla. When opened it looked like, as someone described it, "monkey brains". There was a mass of seeds surrounded by a gel. It did not look very appetising. Yet, somehow, I had a taste and it was gorgeous. When we returned home I looked for them and eventually found some in one Asda store, but it is a long time since I last saw one in this country to eat again. Sometime we just have to have a go and we may get a pleasant surprise.

What about Styles of music? New Hymn and Tunes? Different styles of worship? New ways of "doing church"? Abram stepped out and His faith was counted to him as righteousness. "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' (Romans 4:3). If God asked you to "go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you" how would you react? Would you excitedly leap at the chance? Would you reluctantly come around to it, given lots of persuasion? Would you run in the opposite direction? Or perhaps you're too exhausted even to think about it? How we respond to the unknown may depend on past experiences. Abraham had stepped out before, so appears quite ready to trust God and go again. Nicodemus needed more convincing. Both had great rewards to look forward to: many blessings, and eternal life. Are we ready to step out?

Today the last Sunday service is being held in Lawrence Lane – a day of sadness for many – is it a day when God says to the faithful people "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. " Is that what God may be saying to many of us, as individuals and faith communities. It is time to get up and move with God. If that is what God is asking of you, us, then it is a "risk" worth taking for it is accompanied by a promise and if it is of God it is no risk at all. The past is of importance for it shaped who we are, but the journey ahead is of importance for it shall shape who we shall become and shape the lives of others too. Perhaps it is time to "Try something new".

### StF 345 – And can it be

- 1) And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
- 2) 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
Let angel minds enquire no more.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
Let angel minds enquire no more.
- 3) He left his Father's throne above, so free, so infinite his grace  
Emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for, O my God, it found out me!  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for, O my God, it found out me!
- 4) Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray -  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
- 5) No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

*Charles Wesley*

## Prayers of Intercession

Lord under the cover of darkness Nicodemus came seeking answers. We pray for all who live in darkness, whatever for that takes, in their questioning may they find answers that give peace.

L: In your loving kindness and mercy **R: Hear our Prayer**

Lord, Abraham became the father of nations, we pray for the nations and peoples of the world; may all live to learn in harmony with one another as brothers and sisters should.

L: In your loving kindness and mercy **R: Hear our Prayer**

Lord, your called Abram to leave a land and move to another. We pray for those who are forced to flee from their homes through conflict, fear, natural disaster or for their well being.

L: In your loving kindness and mercy **R: Hear our Prayer**

Lord, we pray for those who are known to us, who are often in our thoughts as we have concerns for them, give to each the support they need and where we are the support they need help us to give without seeking reward other than the joy of sharing love and strength.

L: In your loving kindness and mercy **R: Hear our Prayer**

Before you we remember our own situations, individual as they are we are interdependent with others, guide us that we may be a faithful people of light and truth helping others find purpose for each day.

L: In your loving kindness and mercy **R: Hear our Prayer. 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 94 – To God be the glory

- 1) To God be the glory, great things he has done!  
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,  
Who yielded his life in atonement for sin,  
And opened the life-gate that all may go in:
- 2) O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,  
To every believer the promise of God!  
And every offender who truly believes,  
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives:
- Ch) *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!  
Let the earth hear his voice!  
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!  
Let the people rejoice!  
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;  
And give him the glory - great things  
he has done!*
- 3) Great things he has taught us, great things  
he has done,  
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;  
But purer, and higher, and greater will be  
Our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see:

*Frances Jane van Alstyne*

## Blessing

Let us go forward with courage. Let us go forward with love. Let us travel with God and one another held safe by our Lord's embrace of love. And may the Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us, now and forever. **Amen.**