

August 7th 2022 – Morning Service

Megan Ashmore

Call to Worship

Hebrews 11: 1- 3

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.

StF 2 – Come, let us sing

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| 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. | 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. |
| <i>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.</i> | 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. |

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Prayer

Playful God, you invite us to come and see, to take off our shoes and marvel, caught up in wonder and awe.

Risk-taking Jesus, you call us to question and explore, to put on our shoes and follow you into uncomfortable places.

Creative Spirit, you fill us with love and fruitfulness so that we may walk in your shoes with humility and learn how to love differently.

Playful, risk-taking, and creative one, help us delight in your mystery, and respond with expectation as we place ourselves and each other in the wounded hands of Jesus, that the world might become whole. Amen. (Jill Barber Vice President British Methodist Conference 2015/16)

Talk

The following is a talk for the children, but I've included it in the distributed service because we are called to receive the kingdom of God as a child.

Are you going on holiday? Do you know where and when you are going? How are you getting there? Where are you staying? Have you got things planned that you would like to do?

Both my children are going away this summer. Toby and his family are going to America – to stay with cousins for a week before going to Florida and Disney. This holiday should have happened two years ago but was postponed because of the pandemic. So it has been planned and thought about for a long time and has somewhat evolved as time has gone on.

Esme is going to Mallorca – unexpectedly. Her friend contacted her just this week to ask if she could go next week. So it's been more of a rush – checking that her passport is still in date; booking time off work and of course shopping for appropriate clothing!

This morning we are going to be thinking about Abraham and Sarah. They were called by God to go on a journey. But this was no holiday – literally. They were told to pack up, leave their homeland and move somewhere else. God said, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

Abraham and Sarah didn't know where they were going nor how long it would take to get there. They had to take their tents and all their possessions with them. They had no satnav on their camel train; there was no Pickfords removal company to help them. But Abraham and Sarah heard the word of God; trusted it and obeyed.

"So Abraham left, as the Lord had told him."

Abraham and Sarah just didn't know how many miles they had to go;
Would they get caught in a storm, be too cold or be too warm,
Or meet a hungry lion on the way?

Abraham and Sarah just didn't know how many miles they had to go,
Would they have enough to eat, or get blisters on their feet,
Would they walk too slow and lose their way?

Abraham and Sarah just didn't know how many miles they had to go,
But they knew that God was near, and they didn't need to fear,
God would keep them safe and show the way.

Sometimes we just do not know which way we are called to go,
But God will not leave our side, He sent Jesus as our guide,
Trust in him to lead you all the way.

As the children go out to continue their worship, I'd like to give them some directions – not to find the way to the room – I think they know where they meet. These are directions for living with God, and are a gentle reminder to us all.

- 1) Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus – he will show you the will of God, our Father
- 2) Read the bible – God has a special message for you
- 3) Talk to God and listen to Him – build up your relationship with Him through prayer

Lets us pray: We thank you Lord for the time shared in worship with these children. We pray for a blessing on them all as they continue their worship, and we look forward to seeing them again after the service. Amen.

StF 254 – Seek ye first

- 1) Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And his righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you;
Allelu-, Alleluia:
- 2) Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find;
Knock and the door shall be opened unto you;
Allelu-, Alleluia:
- Ch) *Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia,*
Allelu-, Alleluia!
- 3) We shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu-, Alleluia:

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Prayers of adoration, thanks and confession:

Lord God, we praise you for your word that brought this world to life. We are surrounded by such beauty and wonder; mystery and delicacy; might and majesty. We praise you for the life we have been given; for the joy of living in your presence and for the many blessings we receive from you.

We give you thanks for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ, our saviour, who gave up everything for us, that we might be restored to you. Through his love and obedience we are redeemed, forgiven, offered a new, eternal life of healing and wholeness. Thank you for the Holy Spirit, our guide, comforter and strength.

Father, you have blessed us with so many good things to help us on our journey with you and yet we still wander away from the path you have prepared for us to follow. And then we stumble and fall. Forgive us our foolishness; restore us to your side and help us to be obedient to your call.

You say, "Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

Loving Father, we come. Amen.

Reading: Hebrews 11: 8 - 16

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.

Reflection

Abraham and Sarah - not in the first flush of youth, called on a journey by God. No satnav; no map; no hotel booking; no flight board with final destination boldly highlighted. Just the promise of God, that they would be the founders of a great nation – God’s own people.

What on earth possessed them to do it? To pack up and go. Well, it was nothing on earth.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews devotes a full twelve verses to the faith of this special couple – so let’s explore how they did it – how they had the courage to follow and obey God.

Firstly, they had a vision. They lifted their eyes from their immediate surroundings and looked forward to the land that God was going to give them. Abraham and Sarah had hope in the things to come. Verse 10 says,

“Abraham did it by keeping his eye on an unseen city with real, eternal foundations—the City designed and built by God.” (The Message)

Have you seen any of the Commonwealth games? I was fortunate to be able to go to the athletics event at the Alexander Stadium. Watching the athletes, you can see the sheer determination on their faces as they look to the goal – be it a finishing line or flag; the height above a pole balancing precariously on a stand; or the length of the sand pit that they want to conquer.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes,

“One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13b-14)

Abraham and Sarah realised that God had a plan and chose to be a part of that heavenly vision.

God still has a plan for this world – that all may come to know Him and His saving grace through Jesus.

Keeping that vision in mind, we should fix our eyes on Jesus who will lead us on our journey, our race to the finish line, encouraging and challenging us along the way, until we rest in the glory of God’s kingdom.

Secondly Abraham and Sarah believed in the promise of God. Verse 11 of the Hebrews passage reads,

“By faith, barren Sarah was able to become pregnant, old woman as she was at the time, because she believed the One who made a promise would do what he said.” (The Message)

More traditional translations accredit this verse to Abraham, but whichever version we read it shows us that they both trusted in God’s word. They knew God was a faithful God who stood by His promises.

As we journey, we too should remember that God’s promises are trustworthy and call to mind His comforting, strengthening and honest word.

Take one of these with you today:

Isaiah 54: 10 “The mountains and hills may crumble, but my love for you will never end; I will keep forever my promise of peace.”

Joshua 1:9 “Remember that I commanded you to be strong and brave. So don’t be afraid. The Lord your God will be with you everywhere you go.”

Psalms 32:8 “I will teach you the way you should go; I will instruct you and advise you.”

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Matthew 11: 28 – 29 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Thirdly, Abraham and Sarah had God’s spirit within them.

In Genesis 17: 1 – 8 we read

“Your name will no longer be Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations. I will make you extremely fruitful and will make nations and kings come from you. I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your future offspring throughout their generations. It is a permanent covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you. And to you and your future

offspring I will give the land where you are residing—all the land of Canaan—as a permanent possession, and I will be their God.”

and verses 15 – 16 say,

“God said to Abraham, “As for your wife Sarai, do not call her Sarai, for Sarah will be her name. I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce nations; kings of peoples will come from her.””

In one of my study bibles the editors give a short thought for contemplation after particular passages and for these verses they wrote the following:

“When God wants to turn a situation from despair to delight, all He has to do is breathe into it. The aspirate (the letter ‘h’) is inserted in Abram’s and Sarai’s names, thus indicating that the breath of God was at work. He does the same with the word “impossible”. He breathes into it and it becomes “Him-possible”.

Now I don’t need to add an “h” to my name – though I could – if it’s good enough for Meghan Markle! I just need to ask God to breathe His Spirit into my life – again – and then be sure to make space to receive it.

Abram and Sarai were willing to be changed by God, and because of this and their faith and obedience we are told that God is not ashamed to be called their God. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want God to be ashamed of me. So I pray that God will help me to trust in His word; give me courage and strength to pursue the path He calls me to follow, and the willingness to be transformed by His Holy Spirit. Maybe this is your prayer too.

We sing our next hymn in response to this message:

StF 370 – Breathe on me, breath of God

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|---|---|
| 1) Breathe on me, Breath of God;
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what thou dost love,
And do what thou wouldst do. | 3) Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with thy fire divine. |
| 2) Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with thee I will one will,
To do and to endure. | 4) Breathe on me, Breath of God;
So shall I never die,
But live with thee the perfect life
Of thine eternity. |

Edwin Hatch

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Reading

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Reflection

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning”, so says Jesus as a warning to all those who hear his word. Ever the storyteller and picture painter, Jesus uses two illustrations to make clear his message to us. In Jesus’s days, to be dressed for service meant to tuck your robes into your belt so that you

could move freely, unhindered by trailing garments. The people listening would remember how the Israelites leaving Pharaoh's Egypt were told to eat the first Passover meal dressed ready for leaving. "This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand", commanded God, ensuring that the people were ready to go when He called them to move.

There is a sense of urgency – when Jesus returns we must be ready to respond to him.

Obviously, fashion has changed somewhat since bible days, and clothes are much more practical with outfits for all occasions. But the message remains – be dressed for service; be ready for Jesus when he comes. So how do we do that? Jesus offers us a robe of righteousness to cover our sinful nature – we would be fools not to accept it. And Paul advises us to dress in the full armour of God which will help us stand strong against the enemy. He also says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

Patience. That leads to the second part of the warning – "Keep your lamps burning." Will Jesus return to find a ready home and a tender, welcoming heart; or will he return to an empty, run-down house, where people grew tired of waiting and moved somewhere else, where the people he loved forgot all about him? Will he find joy, or an uneasy surprise?

I'm sure we all know the song "Keep the home fires burning." Written in 1914 by Ivor Novello, the song was an appeal for those at home during World War I to keep their heads up and keep their home fires burning though their hearts were yearning for their lads that were far away.

It was a song of hope – that they would return to a warm, welcoming home and those who loved them.

Abraham and Sarah had hope in the promised land. Jesus encourages us to have hope in the day of his return. Let us not become complacent, faithless or lazy as we wait, but let us press on diligently in service to him who will come back, because we do not know the day or hour when that will be.

Our next hymn sums this all up quite nicely.

StF 473 – Moses, I know you're the man

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| 1) 'Moses, I know you're the man,'
The Lord said.
'You're going to work out my plan,'
The Lord said.
'Lead all the Israelites out of slavery,
And I shall make them a wandering race
Called the People of God.'
<i>So every day,
We're on our way,
For we're a travelling, wandering race,
We're the People of God.</i> | 3) 'No matter what you may do,'
The Lord said,
'I shall be faithful and true,'
The Lord said.
'My love will strengthen you as you go along,
For you're my travelling, wandering race,
You're the People of God.' |
| 2) 'Don't get too set in your ways,'
The Lord said.
'Each step is only a phase,'
The Lord said.
'I'll go before you and I shall be a sign
To guide my travelling, wandering race;
You're the People of God.' | 4) 'Look at the birds in the air,'
The Lord said,
'They fly unhampered by care,'
The Lord said.
'You will move easier if you're travelling light,
For you're a wandering, vagabond race,
You're the People of God.' |

5) 'Foxes have places to go,'
The Lord said,
'But I've no home here below,'
The Lord said.
'So if you want to be with me all your days,
Keep up the moving and travelling on,
You're the People of God.'

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Prayer of Intercession

Lord God, you called Abraham to leave where he was and journey to a place you had not yet shown him. You breathed your life into him enabling him to trust you and follow you. As we bring our prayers of concern for the people and places of this world, we ask that you will give us the faith that can move mountains, so that we can pray with confidence, knowing that you will hear and answer our prayers according to thy loving will.

We breathe in and inhale your peace.

King of peace, we pray for all those whose lives are not peaceful – those living in war torn countries; people living in abusive relationships; families and friends living in turmoil following knife attacks, shootings and other violent attacks on our streets.

We breathe out and thank you for organisations and communities who work to restore and maintain peace.

We breathe in and inhale your comfort.

Compassionate Lord, we bring to you all those who are troubled in body, mind and spirit, knowing that you will heal them and give them strength. We pray for all who are ill; injured; worried; grieving; lonely; depressed.

We breathe out and thank you for the promise of heaven, where you “will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things will be gone forever.”

We breathe in and inhale your love.

Father God, we remember all those who have yet to realise how much you love them. Give us courage to speak up and share the good news of the gospel when the opportunity arises. Help us to show your love by our actions and words, thinking always of how Jesus lived his life to the glory of your name.

We breathe out and thank you for Jesus, whose life, death and resurrection show us your love.

We breathe in and inhale your justice.

Merciful God, bless all those who struggle to make themselves heard above the loud authoritative voices of this world. We ask for guidance and wisdom for world leaders; for tolerance and understanding between your children; for justice and equality for all. We pray especially for the homeless; the oppressed; the unemployed; the refugee.

We breathe out and thank you for the gift of your spirit which inspires and strengthens; comforts and leads.

We breathe in and inhale your blessing.

Gracious God, you give us so much. Thank you for your faithfulness; goodness and patience. Thank you for the joy we receive from knowing you.

We breathe out and offer you our lives in service to you. And we pray that you will accept our monetary gifts to be used to do your work here in this church, community and circuit.

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 156 – From the breaking of the dawn

- 1) From the breaking of the dawn
To the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
That will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For your covenant is sure,
And on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word.
- 2) When I stumble and I sin,
Condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
That in freedom I might live,
So I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
You remember sins no more.
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.
- 3) When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
And I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
You will guide me with your hand
As I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
Every work begun in me,
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.
- 4) Hope that lifts me from despair;
Love that casts out every fear
As I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
For the Comforter has come,
And I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
Grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word.

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Blessing

God of Abraham and Jesus,
May your coming among us find our doors open, our tables set, and all your people ready to greet you.
So bless us we pray with your love; the grace of your son Jesus Christ; and the fellowship of your Holy
Spirit, now and forever. Amen.