

Worship At Home

25th February 2024

Psalm 22: 23-31

"Here's the story I'll tell my friends when they come to worship, and punctuate it with Hallelujahs:

Shout Hallelujah, you God-worshippers; give glory, you sons of Jacob; adore him, you daughters of Israel. He has never let you down never looked the other way when you were being kicked around. He has never wandered off to do his own thing; he has been right there, listening. Here in this great gathering for worship I have discovered this praise-life. And I'll do what I promised right here in front of the God-worshippers.



Down-and-outers sit at God's table and eat their fill. Everyone on the hunt for God is here, praising him. "Live it up, from head to toe. Don't ever quit!" From the four corners of the earth people are coming to their senses, are running back to God. Long-lost families are falling on their faces before him. God has taken charge; from now on he has the last word."

Let us pray

Take a moment. Open your hands. Close your eyes. Sit in the stillness, for as long as you feel you can. When you are ready, say these words - it might help to actually say them out loud:

"God of still, small voices and quiet spaces, God of this moment and this day, make yourself known to me today, that I might come to know you more fully, and serve you more graciously. God of the rest of my week, help me to be a blessing to those I meet this and every day, A reminder of your love for all people, no matter what their situation. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - MP 880 The power of Your love

- ¹ Lord, I come to You, let my heart be changed, renewed,
flowing from the grace that I've found in You.
And, Lord, I've come to know the weaknesses I see in me will be stripped away
by the power of Your love.

*Hold me close, let Your love surround me; bring me near, draw me to Your side.
And as I wait, I'll rise up like the eagle, and I will soar with You,
Your Spirit leads me on in the power of Your love.*

- ² Lord, unveil my eyes, let me see You face to face,
the knowledge of Your love as You live in me.
Lord, renew my mind, as Your will unfolds in my life
in living every day in the power of Your love. *Hold me close . . .*

CCL 1160072

[Prayer comes from Vine at Home,
25th February 2024]

<https://youtu.be/7g7YMip1Mhc?si=Qiw1IS4ZsxsqN32AT>

Let us pray,

Holy God, as a community we worship, on the second week of Lent. In the quietness, in the stillness we gather our thoughts, and pause to pray. We still our hearts to hear your Word. You know, Lord, we desire to love life and we seek good, but sometimes we forget to turn away from temptations, from objects or desires that separate us from you.

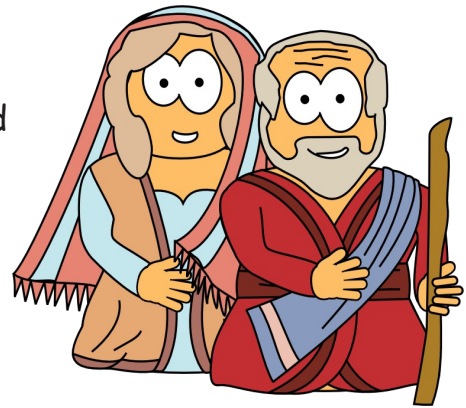
Sometimes out of fear, we fail to speak out for your children, we neglect to care for your earth, and regularly we forget to treat others as we would like to be treated.

Forgive us, we pray. Gracious God, we are grateful to be part of your family, to be held in the promise of eternal love. Teach us mercy, we pray, in the name of Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 17: 1-7; 15,16 and Mark 8.31-38

Reflection: Gaze on Abraham and Sarah and learn from them,
Reflection written by Rev. Moira Laidlaw, used with permission

I love the story of Abraham and Sarah - he's 100 and she's 90 and they have just heard the news that they are going to become parents! Can you imagine them, probably bent over with arthritis, hard of seeing and hearing, his hair already thinning if not gone altogether. No wonder they laughed. I can imagine them holding each other up as they leant on their walking frames and laughed until the tears rolled down their wrinkled faces..



Has it not ever been so as people, but particularly women, have sought to give birth to what at first seems to be an absurd and impossible proposition from God - to respond to God's call to align their lives in the God-pointed direction? Especially if one is considered past an acceptable age - whatever that might be - to be considered able to make a response at all.

Do we hear the echoes across the centuries of the laughter - probably derisive - with which such news has been greeted?

We are the history we journey through, even as Sarah was part and shaper of the history of her time. We don't have many details about Sarah, as she struggled with the important and crucial part she had to play in this Covenant undertaking, simply because she was a woman - a biological necessity.

It's interesting to look up the indexes of some major Old Testament theologies - Most A's begin with Abraham, but when we come to the S'S, we move from Samson, through to Saul without even a mention of Sarah.

I wonder how Sarah really felt about it all. The descendants promised to Abraham could not have become reality if Sarah had not played her crucial role as 'mother of the nations'.

Wholeness is experienced when women and men image the God in whose image they in turn are made - when women and men are enabled and encouraged to respond to God's call on their lives. When women and men laugh together at the seemingly impossible becoming possible, laughter is born no longer from derision, but from celebration.

(Note from the author. The words above are taken from a sermon I preached at a friend's ordination. This friend is a single woman who had been a schoolteacher all her working life and also spent many years of creative lay ministry within her local church.. On retirement, she felt called to study theology and started taking some courses at the Uniting Church Theological College.



At a retreat for female students and ministers this woman - then almost 60 - spoke of her great sadness of never having had the opportunity to give birth. We listened deeply and then a number of us spoke of the gifts she had brought to birth in so many children's lives in her life as a teacher. Now, however, we believed that she was actually giving birth to the possibility of becoming an ordained minister. I think she was 61 when she was ordained, and she experienced a most fulfilling ministry in a couple of parishes before actually retiring.

One of the most wonderful gifts that she received in that time was the invitation from a pregnant woman in one of her congregations. This woman's husband was going to be unavoidably overseas when the birth was due, so they asked their minister to take the husband's place and be there at the child's birth. She told later that it was truly a God-given gift to her - it was like the gift of a long-awaited child.)

The passage from Genesis is primarily about two things: hope and the belief that God can take the most barren and apparent lifeless situation and transform it into new life.. It is the first instalment of a continuing, enthralling story about God breaking into the desert places of life with the promise of a kingdom flowing with milk and honey. The story of Abraham and Sarah was imprinted on the Jewish people's memory as an example of God's gracious actions towards them - as it surely was.



Abraham and Sarah's story is one of faith in the ability to believe in the impossible becoming possible. To dream the impossible dream. They believed that by the grace and power of God, the dream would become reality. There is something here to challenge and uplift us all. So many magnificent dreams and visions and plans are knocked on the head with the verdict it can't be done! We can spend a lot of time and energy putting limitations on the power of God.



Faith is the ability to lay hold of the strength which is made perfect in our weakness. When we believe that grace - God's power and love - is sufficient for all things in such a way that the humanly impossible becomes divinely possible. The reading from Mark on suffering and discipleship has to raise challenges for those who profess to follow Christ. For Mark's message is that the disciple must be at God's disposal in the same way as Jesus was. One of the most difficult aspects of this is the challenge to break down the patterns of thinking and doing that we may have built up on the basis of other values. We all have ways by which we protect ourselves. They may involve attachment to material possessions or our relationships with other people. In other words, the person who desires above all to keep everything under his or her control, who seeks to dominate every situation, is protecting a self that will ultimately be lost.

Jesus never promised us a rose garden, never promised us that faithfulness and success go together. Jesus promises us that in our frantic desire to save our lives, we will lose them. He promises that, if we will dare to throw away our lives with him, we shall find the true source of our life. When we do that who says that the impossible cannot become possible?

Let us pray ...

Living God, we do give you thanks and praise. At the very beginning of time, you spoke the word which replaced the darkness of chaos with life-giving light. A light which has nurtured generations of people, and plants and creatures, great and small. A light almost destroyed when engulfed by people's corrupt and faithless actions. But you, O God, taking the initiative once more, painted the sky in rainbow colours as a sign of your everlasting relationship with all creation. And so, with all the company of heaven and earth we praise your holy name saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Holy God, you brought a new relationship to birth in Jesus Christ who brought your unconditional love into even greater focus. He graced lives with healing and hope, with compassion and power, and as if that were not enough, he gave his very life for us. On the night of his betrayal, as he sat at the table and broke bread with his friends, he said: 'Take and eat; this is my body which is broken for you. Remember me each time you do this.' After they had eaten, he took the cup, and said: 'Remember me as you drink from this, for it is my life, poured out for you - the beginning of a new relationship with God.'

God of all power, breathe your Holy Spirit upon us, and upon these gifts of bread and wine, that they may be for us the life of Christ and that we may make that life visible through our faithful witness to the gospel. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 555 Amazing Grace

¹ Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

² 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

³ Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

⁴ The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

⁵ When we've been there ten
thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's
praise
Than when we first begun.

CCL 1160072

https://youtube.be/zG3wQKwYAA?si=zO_u6EtNfRnp8jR

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. **Amen.**

Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day.

Rev. Susan Thorburn, sthorburn@churchofscotland.org.uk

If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you.