

## Parish of Central Exeter

### Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion

1st Sunday after Trinity 14 June 2020

## Is anything too hard for the Lord?

*Thanks to Sheila who has chosen much of this morning's liturgy, written the comments and chosen the music.*

*The church's calendar has now moved into 'Ordinary Time' where there is an option for a continuous reading from the Old Testament. This year these begin in Genesis with the call of Abraham and Sarah.*



*This 6th century mosaic in the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna follows the theme for this Sunday and also for the third Sunday after Trinity. Left we see Abraham and Sarah, Sarah listening in, and Abraham offering a lamb on a plate to the three visitors (complete with haloes to emphasise their significance). On the right Abraham is about to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. The ram waits close by. The right and left side images parallel each other to emphasise the sacrificial nature of these actions. The story of the hospitality of Abraham became the main way of the Eastern churches representing the Trinity.*

*We begin our worship today with the Taizé song 'In the Lord I'll be ever thankful' and some poetry and prayers linked with the Trinity.*

*You can access the words and music on*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Yzr60p57h8&list=PLZqH2sD6POqN-RNDIU-uaOs9\\_R9\\_gMVe-&index=5&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Yzr60p57h8&list=PLZqH2sD6POqN-RNDIU-uaOs9_R9_gMVe-&index=5&t=0s)

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,  
In the Lord I will rejoice!  
Look to God, do not be afraid.  
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near,  
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near.

## Trinity Sunday by George Herbert

Lord, who hast form'd me out of mud,  
And hast redeem'd me through thy blood,  
And sanctified me to do good;

Purge all my sins done heretofore;  
For I will confess my heavy score,  
And I will strive to sin no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,  
With faith, with hope, with charity;  
That I may run, rise, rest with thee.



### Comment and Confession

The poet and priest George Herbert here summarises the Christian faith – creation, redemption and sanctification, with a confession and commitment to live a virtuous life with God. (*You can read more on this in Janet Morley 'The Heart's Time pp6-7).*

Aware how much we fail to live such a life please use this poem and silence for our confession today.

### Assurance of forgiveness

Remember the words of 1 John 1v9 'If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.'

### Alternative collect for First Sunday after Trinity

God of truth, help us to keep your law of love  
and to walk in ways of wisdom,  
that we may find true life  
in Jesus Christ your Son.

### Be Still

In the CMS daily prayer there is this meditation which has a threefold structure. I find it helpful to remember the God we worship and trust is in all these levels of space and time and makes/loves/keeps us in a community for all the earth.

As we turn now to read and reflect on ancient stories which have been part of the faithful community for centuries, we remember that God is

In the story-rich past  
In the life-filled present  
In the unfolding future

Jesus of all the earth  
Jesus in all the earth  
Jesus for all the earth

Global, local, personal  
Above, without, within  
Beyond us, around us, and with us

In the story-rich past  
In the life-filled present  
In the unfolding future

Creator, saviour, spirit  
Source, word, breath  
Make, love, keep

A community of all the earth  
A community in all the earth  
A community for all the earth



### Reading Genesis 18:1-15

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

<sup>3</sup> He said, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. <sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. <sup>5</sup> Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way – now that you have come to your servant.'

'Very well,' they answered, 'do as you say.'

<sup>6</sup> So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. 'Quick,' he said, 'get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.'<sup>7</sup> Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

<sup>9</sup> 'Where is your wife Sarah?' they asked him.

'There, in the tent,' he said.

<sup>10</sup> Then one of them said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.'

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. <sup>11</sup> Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. <sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'

<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Will I really have a child, now that I am old?" <sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'

<sup>15</sup> Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.'

But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'

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## Reflection

This passage is often referred to as 'Abraham and the Three Visitors' whereas it is really about the 'Laughter of Sarah'. This is laughter we can sympathise with. It is absurd! Having the joyous gift of a child when you are well past child-bearing age. Yes, God has called them. They have left their homeland to follow that call. God has promised them a son, but Sarah has not had a child. They have tried another way, with Sarah offering her slave woman Hagar, who has borne Abraham a son, Ishmael. The years have passed and still Sarah is childless. This is painful (as it continues to be for couples today) but she and Abraham have resigned themselves to the situation and so find it hard to believe God's word. In Genesis 17 God promises to Abraham again that he will have a son by Sarah, Ishmael will not be his heir. Abraham falls on his face and laughs at the idea. It is hard to believe that God can indeed bring new life under such circumstances.

Chapter 18 verses 1 to 8 set the scene: the strangers appear, and Abraham gives them a hospitable welcome. The narrator gives a clue at the beginning that the visit is special by stating 'The Lord appeared', before continuing with an account of the meal provided for the three visitors. Then follows the birth announcement with a definite time scale. Here is the specific promise of God but after all these years of waiting it seems too much to take in. Sarah (as Abraham did) doubts these words and finds it hard to believe the promise. Sarah laughs, and denies that she laughed. There this story ends, and the chapter continues with other material. It is not until chapter 21 that we read of the birth of this long-awaited son for Sarah and Abraham. He is given the name 'Isaac' that means 'he laughs' and Sarah says, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' (Gen 21:6) This second burst of laughter is the laughter of amazement, gratitude, joy, relief and all the other emotions that come with the unexpected birth of a child. It has taken a long time. They have had to wait on the Lord and to learn not to try to do things in their own strength. Yet the first laughter of incredulity and disbelief is important as it shows the reality and difficulty of faith.

How do we respond to the question 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' Are we like the disciples who see the earnest, devout but rich young man turn away from following Jesus and wonder who can be saved? Can we hear Jesus say 'For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.' (Matt 19:26) Yet a little later we read Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying in agony 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want.' (Matt 26:39) For Jesus at that moment his way was the way of suffering.

My prayer is that we may trust in God through the uncertainty of the current situation, not be overwhelmed by all the difficulties, and seek wisdom for how to live, pray and work for God here in Exeter.

### **Hymn 'God moves in a mysterious way'**

*This is not the tune we usually use, but you will certainly recognise it. Words appear on the screen. Access on:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MgbVoyPWTo>

## **Affirmation of Faith**

We believe in God who is love and who has given the earth to all people;

We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God, who came to heal us, and to free us from all forms of oppression;

We believe in the spirit of God who works in and through all who are turned towards the truth;

We believe in the Church: the community of faith which is called to worship and serve God and to be at the service of all people;

We believe in God's power to transform and transfigure, fulfilling the promise of a new heaven and a new earth where love, justice and peace will flourish.        Amen

## **Intercessions**

We are a world that is desperate for you, God.

When powers struggle for dominance,  
and war, oppression and abuse result;

When groups of people oppose one another  
because of ideology, religion or culture;

We need a God who is bigger than ourselves,  
and our personal interests.

*(Prayer may be offered for specific areas of conflict in the world.)*

When people are disregarded and devalued  
because of poverty, geography or disease;

When compassion and justice is withheld to some  
because of sexuality, race or gender;

We need a Saviour who is more compassionate than we are  
who includes even those we would exclude.

*(Prayer may be offered for specific people and places  
of suffering in the world.)*

When resources are mismanaged and abused,  
and the world and its creatures are destroyed;

When motivation is scarce and creativity is in short supply  
to address the challenges that we face;

We need a Spirit who is more powerful and more creative  
than we could ever be.

*(Prayer may be offered for specific challenges and issues  
that we struggle with in the world.)*

Lord God, Loving Saviour, Empowering Spirit,

we offer you these prayers

because we need you so desperately.

Captivate us, call us and fill us,  
that we may be carriers of your eternal life  
to this world that you love so dearly. Amen.

— written by John van de Laar © 2008 Sacredise.com

### **A short Spiritual Communion**

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.



Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.

O God,  
help me to trust you,  
help me to know that you are with me,  
help me to believe that nothing  
can separate me from your love  
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

You might like to access The Kingdom of God is Justice and Peace  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSI2xdDvX6Y>

The kingdom of god is justice and peace  
And joy in the Holy Spirit  
Come, Lord and open in us the gates of your kingdom

*As we prepare for communion you might like to reflect over this famous icon (below) and the links between the story of Abraham and his visitors and the Communion Service.*



The Hospitality of Abraham, Andrei Rublev, c1410, Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow. Abraham and Sarah are absent with the focus is narrowed to the three visitors, the meal a small portion in a traditional bowl, and the tent a small structure in the background elongated, like the visitors, who are here shown as angels.

*Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits you have given me,  
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.  
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,  
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,

may I know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen. *(after the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester)*

### **Post-Communion Prayer**

Eternal Father,  
we thank you for nourishing us  
with these heavenly gifts:  
may our communion strengthen us in faith,  
build us up in hope,  
and make us grow in love;  
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Closing Prayers**

Dear Lord  
I offer you the day ahead  
because *it's* the one you've given me,  
the one I hope you'll walk in with me  
the day I want to walk in with you...

I offer you this day's burdens, Lord:  
large and small, heavy and light,  
and pray you'll help me carry them...

I offer you this day's mistakes  
- even before I make them:  
help me avoid them, Lord,  
and, please, when I make them,  
forgive me...

I offer you:  
this day's work, that it be fruitful;  
this day's rest, that it be peaceful;  
and this day's time, that it be blessed...

I offer you this day's smiles and joys  
and pray you make sure  
I don't miss even one of them...

I offer you this day's worries and fears,  
the real and the imagined,  
and pray you'll be in all of them  
my courage and strength...

I offer you this day's challenges,  
the ones I can expect and those that will surprise me:



be with me and help me through every one...

I offer you every opportunity I have today  
to comfort and heal, to forgive and pardon  
to lift up any who, in need,  
may reach out for my help...

I offer you what little I have  
and pray that I'll be open, Lord,  
to all you offer me...

Amen.

*(From Concord Pastor)*

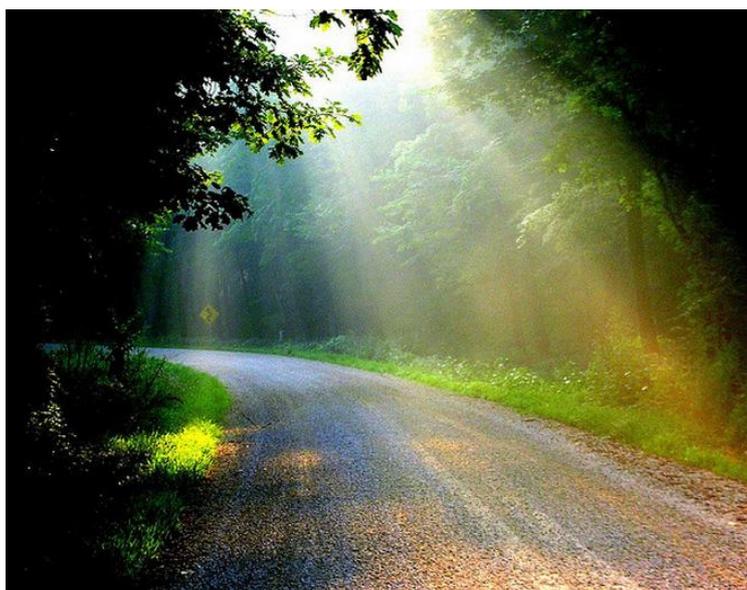
**Grace** *(Church of Scotland)*

As we go from here, this we will do:  
We will put things in order,  
listen to the appeal of truth,  
agree with one another,  
and live in peace,  
faithful to the God of love and peace.

So may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen

*'One more step along the road I go', sung by Housall Hall Choir in Bossall Parish Church  
(Rydale North Yorkshire)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhtSwx7cpTY>



**Night Prayer is on the next page**

## Night Prayer



If you are able to do so, you might wish to light a candle near a window.

Our candle – a photograph  
our church - a virtual chapel,  
our musicians – on YouTube—  
but we are gathering in real time, Lord,  
and our prayers rise up from hearts and souls  
that ache, rejoice, weep, laugh and find *you*  
in the words and songs we share  
from our iPad, laptop, smart phone pews...

*(Adapted from Concord pastor)*

*Nigel has begun to experiment with a virtual choir. You may recognise some of the participants and watch out for the singing teddy bear! The choir sing the canon 'O God from whom all blessings flow.'*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRIW3sFI5So&feature=youtu.be>

## Reading

### Romans 4 18-25

*This is not the reading set for today but is taken from the preceding chapter of Romans as it is more specific to our earlier thoughts about Abraham.*

<sup>18</sup> In hope Abraham believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness<sup>[b]</sup> of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup> No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup> But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him

who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,<sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification

### **Comment**

In this reading Paul focuses on Abraham – the father of the Jewish people – as an example of a person living by faith. It is his faith, says Paul, that unlocks God's power to fulfil the promises made to him.

### **Reflective prayer**

*(Remember that Abraham's name was originally Abram)*

Long before the change of name,  
before the first signs of new life  
showed the beginnings of promises fulfilled,  
You asked Abram to make his home among foreigners,  
and share the blessing that was to come.

And now, O God, you ask the same faith of us:  
The faith to count ourselves among the least,  
to find our place alongside the poor and broken;  
The faith to trust in your mercy and your promises,  
and to share what we have received;  
The faith to wait expectantly for your reign of justice and equity,  
together with those who most need its gifts.

Teach us to be children of Abram, sharers of the blessings we enjoy:  
The blessing of plenty shared with those who have need,  
The blessing of healing shared with those who are sick and wounded,  
The blessing of joy shared with those who celebrate  
and of tears shared with those who grieve,  
The blessing of friendship shared with those who are excluded,  
and of solidarity with those who fight injustice,  
The blessing of peace shared with those in conflict,  
and of confrontation shared with those who bring harm;  
And in some small way, may our faith and our sharing,  
help to bring your promises into being  
in our world. Amen.

*From sacredise.com*

### **Closing commendation**

Lord,  
protect all those still wide awake,  
and watch over those now fast asleep  
that awake we might keep watch with you  
and asleep, rest deeply in your peace...

*As we bring worship to a close you might like to access Bee playing the song: 'She sits like a bird.' The words are below. Just left click on the icon and a box should appear asking if you wish to open the file. If you are used to downloading music this should not present any problem. If you are not, your computer probably has a music playing program on it which will open and respond to the file. Just give it time!*



She sits like a bird  
-flute variations.m4a

*She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters,  
Hovering on the chaos of the world's first day;  
She sighs and she sings, mothering creation,  
Waiting to give birth to all the Word will say.*

*She wings over earth, resting where she wishes,  
Lighting close at hand or soaring through the skies;  
She nests in the womb, welcoming each wonder,  
Nourishing potential hidden to our eyes.*

*She dances in fire, startling her spectators,  
Waking tongues of ecstasy where dumbness reigned;  
She weans and inspires all whose hearts are open,  
Nor can she be captured, silenced or restrained.*

*For she is the Spirit, one with God in essence,  
Gifted by the Saviour in eternal love;  
She is the key opening the scriptures,  
Enemy of apathy and heavenly dove.*

*(Iona Community, 1988.)*

*And finally St Brendan's journey prayer*

God, bless to me this day,  
God bless to me this night;  
Bless, O bless, Thou God of grace,  
Each day and hour of my life;  
Bless, O bless, Thou God of grace,  
Each day and hour of my life.

### **Thanks**

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this service:  
Especially to Sheila for this morning's service and Nigel and Bee for their music.  
Material is taken or developed from various websites and blogs and normally identified in the text.