

Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion
7th Sunday after Trinity 26 July 2020

The service this morning and the comments are from Sheila. Intercessions sent in by Betsy.

Welcome everyone.

Rags to Riches –The stories of Jacob and Laban Genesis 29:1 – 31:55

'Then God remembered Rachel' Gen 30:22

We begin with a text that reminds us that humans have always held memories and passed on knowledge by telling stories – in narrative. We long for the time when we will be able to gather together again to hear such stories or watch such dramas.

Storytelling

Flames flickered in the draughty timber hall, making the shadows live. The storyteller paused for effect. His hearers squatted, motionless, oblivious to the cold darkness that chilled their backs.

He pointed a scrawny arm to the great doors, barred against the dark night and all its enemies.

'Out of the blue-black darkness the monster, Grendel*, came.'
His voice was a fine-tuned instrument, strung to the pitch of his hearers' emotions.
He played them, as an angler his fish.



** Grendel is the name of the malicious dragon killed by Beowulf in the famous Anglo-Saxon poem*

The spoken word was a potent force in those days:
the imagination, unshackled by the weight of years and of knowledge,
was simple and direct, in easy touch with the forces of good and evil.

No nuances or shades of meaning marred the simplicity:
there was only the story, onward-moving by its own momentum.
Woven from its own intrinsic truth, moving to its inevitable end.
What poets lived who never wrote a word–
What wealth of tales are bound in sound at the far edges of the universe!
In years to come, words would be caught in flight, imprisoned on paper.
Monks were their jailers. Caxton and Gutenberg,

those first great word-processors, discovered duplication,
deserve our gratitude.

But the old ways are not forgotten wholly, for even now,
at certain times and places, where minds are young, receptive,
and teacher-storytellers sit in concrete halls, in radiator-warmth,
the spell of words is woven anew, and eager hearers sit,
oblivious to the weight of civilisation pressing upon their backs,
and thrill to hear again the reading of the age-old tale –
and Grendel, fearsome monster of the lake,
out of the blue-black darkness comes once more.

© Pam Gidney *Worship Live No. 45 Autumn 2009*

Opening Prayer

In the stillness of this moment, Lord, we come to worship you
with many different ideas about how and why, where and when;
yet sensing through them all that it was your voice that called us here:
**In the stillness of this moment, Lord, we come to worship you;
and you, in your infinite love and mercy, accept each one of us.**

Silence

In the rush and madness of life, Lord, we call on you;
knowing only our need; all our theology lost
in a sea of anxiety, confusion, hope, pain and loss.
**In the rush and madness of life, Lord, we call on you;
and you, in your infinite love and mercy, hear each one of us.**

Silence

In the communion of this hour, Lord, we bring you our world;
its sickness, its suffering, our guilt and our grief, its joy and its beauty.
**In the communion of this hour, Lord, we bring you our world;
and you, in your infinite love and mercy, laugh and weep with each one of us.**

Silence

Take all our prayers, Lord; our stutterings, our fine words,
and our unspoken, incoherent thoughts; and use them,
that we and the world in which we live may find our wholeness in you. **Amen.**

© Mary Elms *Worship Live No 42 Autumn 2008*

Please access the site below for the song 'All my Hope on God is founded.' Words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4zX9xZCN0o>

Prayers of penitence

Merciful God

For the things we have done that we regret
Forgive us

For the things we have failed to do that we regret
Forgive us

For all the times we have acted without love
Forgive us

For the times we have reacted without thought
Forgive us

For the times we have failed to forgive
Forgive us

God of all time forgive us and enable us to lay down our burden of regret.
Amen

Reading

The appointed readings contain chapters 29, 30 and 31 of Genesis, which is far too long to insert here. We have included the opening scenes of the story, and would encourage you to read the whole text for yourselves. The Gospel readings continue in Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 which include the parable of the mustard seed, hidden treasure, fine pearl, and net of fish. Keith will focus on these in Night Prayer.

Genesis 29 1-20

Jacob Arrives in Paddan Aram

1 Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. **2** There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. **3** When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

4 Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?" "We're from Harran," they replied. **5** He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?" "Yes, we know

him,” they answered. **6** Then Jacob asked them, “Is he well?” “Yes, he is,” they said, “and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep.” **7** “Look,” he said, “the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture.” **8** “We can’t,” they replied, “until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep.” **9** While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherd.



Meeting of Jacob and Rachel.
Etching and aquatint. Marc Chagall. Sometime in 1930s.

10 When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban’s sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle’s sheep.

11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. **12** He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father. **13** As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister’s son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things.

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

14 Then Laban said to him, “You are my own flesh and blood.” After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, **15** Laban said to him, “Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.” **16** Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. **17** Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.

18 Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter

Rachel.” **19** Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.”

20 So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Reflection

These three chapters come between Jacob’s encounter with God through his dream of a ladder between heaven and earth, and his wrestling with a stranger, being given his new name and his meeting with Esau. They recount the 20 years Jacob spends in Haran, from his first meeting with his uncle Laban as a fugitive from his brother’s wrath and needing to find a wife, to his departure with wives, 11 sons, a daughter, servants and flocks, and an agreement between himself and Laban. This is a ‘rags to riches’ story with humour (Jacob showing off to Rachel at the well by moving the stone 29:9-11; Laban searching for the household gods which Rachel is sitting on and deceiving her father with the excuse of her period 31:33-35) and magic (the mandrakes 30:14-17; sheep and goat breeding 30:37—43). It is a story in which conflict continues – he had deceived his brother but now finds his uncle has deceived him. On his wedding night he is given the older daughter Leah before he is permitted also to marry the younger, prettier Rachel whom he loved. Much later the

division of the flocks causes conflict with Laban as does Jacob's departure with the family and flocks.

In the central section we find again the theme of barrenness – Rachel, the beloved wife is barren (29:31) and for the next 26 verses we read of the differing ways the 10 sons and 1 daughter are born to Leah and 2 maidservants. Then we come to 31:22- 24

'Then God remembered Rachel, he listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." She named him Joseph, and said "May the Lord add to me another son.'"

God remembered, listened and acted. Now Rachel has a favoured son and can rejoice while Jacob begins to plan for his departure. He can bargain with Laban as a prosperous man with authority thanks to the increase in his flocks. Through the messiness of the individual lives, the hurt and disagreements, it seems that God is working. Laban acknowledges that he has been blessed by God while Jacob has worked for him (30:27). Jacob reflects on how God has led and blessed him when he discusses with Rachel and Leah his plan to leave and return to his homeland (31:4-16).

The Israelites would see this ancient saga as the story of their origin –the origin of the 12 tribes of Israel. The characters in this story were free to act and make mistakes yet God was working to create a community through whom he could reveal his love for all people. Eventually from one of these tribes would come the promised Messiah, Jesus, though his genealogy shows that those on the margins are included (with Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth in Matthew 1:3, 5). Jesus continued the tradition of telling stories and the first one set for today is from Matthew 13:31-32.

'Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.'"

The original hearers of Jesus' words must have wondered what he meant, while for those who first heard Matthew's gospel, small communities of believers scattered across the Roman empire, this picture of great growth from an insignificant seed must have been a word of encouragement. Through the centuries and across the globe the kingdom of heaven has spread, through the organised church and through others who have lived out the values of the kingdom. This can encourage us as we seek to continue a Christian presence in the city centre of Exeter.

I conclude this morning with these words of assurance and trust from Paul's letter to the Romans. Today the extract is the final verses of chapter 8. Paul's affirmation that absolutely nothing can 'separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8:39)

Song

Our next song is Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation. Words appear on the screen. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QQezNMfaL4>

Creed

We believe in the God who provides for our every need,
Who has an answer to our deepest questions,
And a purpose for us in life.
Today we praise God the provider.

We believe in Jesus Christ, our holy brother,
Who stands by our side when light turns into darkness,
Who suffers our pain and turns it into a blessing.
For the presence of Christ in our lives,
We praise God the provider.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the breath of life,
Who inspires us when our spirits are dried up,
Who creates something new when old structures crumble.
For the spirit of hope and renewal,
We praise God the provider.
Amen.

(Pastor Andreas Wagner on Modernliturgist.org)

Intercessions *(from Carmina Gadelica)*

Prayer at Dressing

Bless to me, O God,
My soul and my body;
Bless to me, O God,
My belief and my condition;

Bless to me, O God,
My heart and my speech,
And bless to me, O God,
The handling of my hand;

Strength and busyness of the morning,
Habit and temper of modesty,
Force and wisdom of thought,
And thine own path, O God of virtues,
Till I go to sleep this night;

The Homestead (think of Jacob at the well)

O God, bless my homestead,
Bless Thou all therein.

O God, bless my kindred,
Bless Thou my substance.

O God, bless my words,
Bless Thou my converse.

O God, bless my errand,
Bless Thou my journey.

O God, lessen my sin,
Increase Thou my trust.

O God, ward me from distress,
Ward Thou from me misfortune.

O God, shield me from guilt,
Fill Thou me with joy.

And, O God let naught to my body
That shall do harm to my soul
When I enter the fellowship
Of the great Son of Mary.

For Aid

We bring (*name*) in weakness
For your strengthening

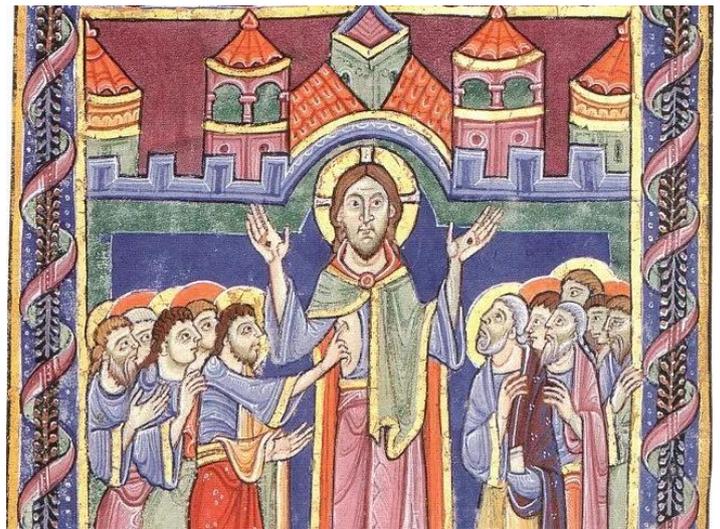
We bring (*name*) in sickness
For your healing

We bring (*name*) who is lost
For your guidance

We bring (*name*) in trouble
For your calming

We bring (*name*) who is lonely
For your love

We bring (*name*) who is dying
For your resurrection.



From the twelfth century St Alban's Psalter

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.



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.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

As we prepare for communion you might like to access 'The Table of the Lord', words by Richard, music by Nigel and sung by the Langford Singers. The words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCZmrj81t8o&feature=youtu.be>



Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

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

Lord God, whose Son is the true vine and the source of life,
ever giving himself that the world may live:
may we so receive within ourselves
the power of his death and passion
that, in his saving cup,
we may share his glory and be made perfect in his love;
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Sending out

To the ends of the earth
Go and build bridges
Go and connect
Demolish dividing walls
At least peer over them

Search for openings
Find points of intersection
Along the many footpaths
See not a single way
Know your own path
And cherish its rightness for you
Pause at crossroads and gaze
Down another's route
To cherish its rightness for them.
Each path holds its own beauty

For God has passed there
Ruach, a traveling companion
along each trodden pathway
across each bridge

(Ana Gobledele from Zambia on worshipwords.co.uk)



Blessing

May the Lord bless us and keep us;
the Lord make his face shine on us,
and be gracious to us;
the Lord turn his face towards us
and give us peace;
Amen

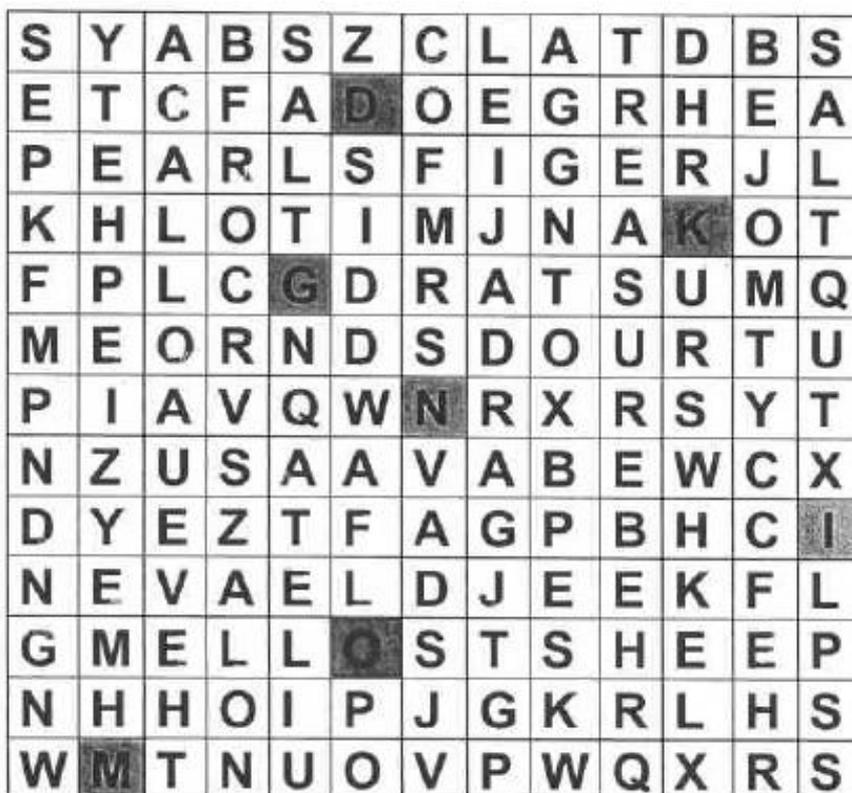
Our closing song is 'The Lord is my Shepherd' Sung here by a virtual choir and group of musicians. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckdzrqzZu4>

Please scroll down for Coffee Break

Coffee Break

Sheila found this Word search by Don Pickard in 'Worship Live' No. 22. The darkened square letters are an anagram of a word associated with the Matthew Gospel readings that we are following.

Having worked that out, search for ten other words associated with the anagram. They may read horizontally, vertically or diagonally and in any direction.



St Swithun's Day (July 15)

Swithun was Bishop of Winchester from 852 to 863. His shrine at Winchester was supposedly a site of numerous miracles in the Middle Ages. It is said that the monks at the cathedral were told to stop whatever they were doing and head to the church to praise God every time that a miracle happened. It seems that the monks at some point got so fed up with this, because they sometimes had to wake up and go to the church three or four times each night, that they decided to stop going. St Swithun then appeared in a dream to warn them that if this continued, the miracles would cease. The monks gave in.

It is supposed to rain for a further forty days if it rains on St Swithun's Day. However in 1924 13.5 hours of sunshine in London were followed by 30 of the next 40 days being wet, and 1913 a 15-hour rainstorm was followed by 30 dry days of 40.

Please scroll down for night prayer

Night Prayer

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



The Kingdom of God

You might like to begin this time of reflection with the Taizé chant 'The kingdom of God is justice and peace' Words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMaCK9JFAZc>

Opening Prayers

We don't see it, but it's everywhere we look;
We don't hear it, but its message is constantly whispered throughout the world;
We can't touch it, but its energy flows through every interaction, every connection.

This Kingdom of Yours, God, is hidden in the ordinary stuff
that makes up our everyday lives;
It's like yeast in a loaf of bread, like a tiny seed that imperceptibly sprouts and grows
in the secret, unseen place;

And while we may miss it, or doubt it, or wonder why it appears weak
in the face of evil,
This Kingdom of Yours exerts an inexorable influence on us
calling us to be more than our selfishness and pride
would lead us to believe we are
leading us to love and serve and connect in ways
that leave us and our world different,
more alive, more real, more whole.

And so, God, we celebrate this hidden Kingdom of Yours
we praise You for its gentle power,
and we open ourselves, once again,
to its life-giving influence.

Amen.

(Sacredise.com)

Reading

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast (New International Version)

³¹ He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

³³ He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

³⁴ Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

The Parable of the Net

⁴⁷ “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied.

⁵² He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

Reflection

We are presented with some quite different metaphors, and by saying the Kingdom of Heaven is like all of these, Jesus is reminding us there is no one straightforward definition. Yeast and mustard seed point to how small things can have a large impact, whereas the treasure and pearl sound simple, but having bought the field or pearl at tremendous cost, what do you do with it? The net of fish also talks about judgement rather like the wheat and the tares from last week. A mixed bunch!

I am offering you the opportunity to reflect on these parables through two different artistic media.



The first is 'A Mustard Seed' by Piety Choi a South Korean artist now living in the USA. She says '*The large red round image symbolizes the circle of life in which the people of the world engage and interact with one another. The darker shades represent the dying, whereas the crimson spots remind us of the élan vital. Come closer, for there are tiny seeds nested around the roots. They recall the pith of the parable in the triple gospel tradition, in which Jesus invites us to imagine how they will grow to provide the birds of the air with rest. One may well observe the flying creatures hovering from left to right. We all are invited as the members of the believing communities to come together and construct all good connections starting small yet with a grand vision of the wholeness of life.*'

Then we have one of R. S Thomas's well-known poems: The Bright Field.

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the
pearl of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.



Prayer

Generous God,
you give us gifts and make them grow:
though our faith is small as mustard seed,
make it grow to your glory
and the flourishing of your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Closing prayers

(From a Celtic service of Compline on the website of the Northumbria Community)

Thou Lord and God of power,
shield and sustain me this night.
I will lie down this night with God,
and God will lie down with me;
I will lie down this night with Christ,
and Christ will lie down with me;
I will lie down this night with the Spirit,
and the Spirit will lie down with me;
God and Christ and the Spirit,
be lying down with me.

The peace of God
be over me to shelter me,
under me to uphold me,
about me to protect me,
behind me to direct me,
ever with me to save me.

The peace of all peace
be mine this night
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

*We bring worship to a close with *Glory to thee, my God, this night*, sung as a round to the well-known tune of Thomas Tallis (c1505-1585). The words are below.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYJ8SneHfT4>

Glory to thee my God this night
For all the blessings of the light:
Keep me, O keep me King of kings,
Beneath the shadow of thy wings.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Thanks

*Thanks to everyone who has contributed to these services:
Especially to Sheila for the morning reflection, service and hymns, Betsy for the intercessions,
Sheila for the wordsearch, Nigel and Richard for their composition.*

*Other material taken or developed from various websites and blogs is normally identified in
the text.*

