

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 2nd July 2023

Prepared by the Revd Kate Cambridge

*I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, for ever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to
all generations.*

*I declare that your steadfast love is established for
ever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.*

(Psalm 89.1-2)

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

[New every morning is the love](#)

New every morning is the love
Our wakening and uprising prove;
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,
Restored to life and power and thought.

New mercies, each returning day,
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

If, on our daily course, our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask;
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.

Only, O Lord, in Thy dear love
Fit us for perfect rest above;
And help us this and every day
To live more nearly as we pray.

John Keble (1792-1866)

Prayers of Approach and Confession

As another day dawns, the sun rises in the sky and the light flows across the land, our thoughts turn once again to the duties and joys which this new day brings. New challenges to face, yet also new opportunities to see God at work in our lives, to recognise the signs of his love in the world around us, to count our blessings and to be a blessing to others.

Gracious God, renew our hearts and our minds this day, give us eyes to see you at work and hearts open to hearing your still small voice. Forgive us for how readily our own worries and daily tasks distract us and for the sins which turn us away from you.

Each day your forgiveness and your love is offered anew, each day brings the joy of knowing you and the chance to grow nearer to you. We thank you and offer ourselves anew to you this day.

May we bring you glory as, each in our own homes, we are united in our prayers, reflections and worship of you. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Read Romans 6.12-23

Read Genesis 22.1-14

Reflection

In CS Lewis' famous Narnia Chronicles, Aslan is a major character. If you have ever read the books or watched the film, you will know that Aslan is a talking lion. He is described as the King of the Beasts, the son of the Emperor-over-the-sea, and the King above all High Kings in Narnia. You may also be aware of the parallels between Aslan and Jesus, the 'Lion of Judah'. In 'the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', Narnia is a land of perpetual winter, ruled over by the White Witch, a place of danger and fear. It is when Aslan gives his life in place of Edmund, a traitor sentenced to death by the White Witch, that this changes. Aslan's death, at the hands of the Witch, is followed by a victorious resurrection to new life. Aslan rescues his followers, joins in the fight against the forces of evil and the Witch is killed, her tyranny over.

The similarities between Aslan's death and resurrection and the death and resurrection of Jesus are clear, as Lewis meant them to be. In dying for the sins of others, Aslan broke the power of sin and in its place brought new life and freedom to Narnia. In our epistle reading today, Paul reminds his readers that they have received freedom through Jesus, and are slaves to sin no longer. '*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*' (Romans 6.23)

However, it was our reading from Genesis today which brought the story of Aslan to my mind. Let me explain. The passage is a familiar one to many of us. Abraham has been promised that he will be the Father of many nations and, in his old age, has been blessed with his son Isaac, through whom these promises will be fulfilled. Yet in today's narrative, we are told that God tests Abraham. Abraham is to take his only son Isaac (the passage seems to conveniently ignore his son, Ishmael, born to Hagar), the son whom he loves, and to offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains.

Throughout the Old Testament, human sacrifice is regarded with horror, an abhorrence performed by nations who do not know God. Why then does God test Abraham in this awful way? The tension in the passage increases as Abraham and his son make their way to the place of sacrifice, carrying the wood, the fire and the knife, leaving behind the servants and the donkey as they get closer. When Isaac asks about the burnt offering, Abraham simply replies, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt-offering, my son.' And God does indeed provide a ram, which is sacrificed, but not before Abraham binds his son, places him on the altar and prepares to take his life.

What are we to make of this account? The Jewish title for this story is the 'Akedah' or binding of Isaac, and later Jewish texts interpret it as the archetype of Old Testament sacrifice, where an animal suffers in the place of the human worshipper. Both Calvin and Luther recognise the inherent contradiction in the account, between the command and the promise of God. God, who has promised life through Isaac, also apparently commands his death. Old Testament scholar Brueggemann asks, '*Can the same God who promises life also command death?*' So disturbing is this story that Henry Keating, an eminent Methodist theologian, writes, '*It is all, of course, a big mistake on Abraham's part. God could not have demanded human sacrifice, but maybe a Middle-Bronze-Age man could be excused for not knowing that, and the mistake does not diminish the faith.*'

Surely Keating has struck on something of key importance here, for as Christians we vehemently believe that God is good and abhors human sacrifice, that it is not and has never been God's will. Yet surely too we are called to wrestle with texts like this passage from Genesis 22. They remind us that we do not understand God and that there is a tension between the divine sovereignty of God – his right as King to demand our obedience – and his gracious faithfulness to us his people.

Back to 'the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.' When some of the key characters hear about Aslan, the great Lion, they question whether he is safe. They are told, '*Safe.....who said anything about safe. 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you!*' Other passages in the Narnia Chronicles point out that Aslan is not a tame lion, he is wild, free, unpredictable, you can't keep him. Do we want a tame God, a safe God, one we can carry in our pocket to answer our prayers, keep us safe, who is near in case of danger, predictable and dependable? I don't believe Abraham would have called God safe – but he believed from the depths of his being that God was good. Not tame, not safe, not biddable, but definitely good. Whether a good God would demand the sacrifice of Isaac, even to then provide a lamb in his place, I am not so sure, but Abraham knew that God would find a way to bring life, even in this scenario of death. God is proved good and human sacrifice is not a part of the Abrahamic faiths and never will be.

Despite the challenges of this passage, it is an important one and in the early church, it soon reminded Christians of another story of sacrifice, and of life coming from a place of death. God told Abraham, '*Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.*' (Gen 22.12). In John's gospel, we learn that God's love for the world led him to give his only Son for us. '*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.*' (John 3.16)

Jesus gave his life freely for the life of the world – in Mark 10.45 he tells his disciples, *‘For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’* And while we may struggle to understand the life of Jesus given for us, and the mysteries of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we see that God brings life out of death, hope out of despair. Just as God provided the ram to die in Isaac’s place, so Jesus died for our sins, so that we may be raised to new life with him. Jesus, the Lion of Judah, is also the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Faith is not always easy, we do not always understand the ways of God but we can trust in the goodness of God. Safe – no, tame – certainly not, but he is the King and he is good. Amen.

As we ponder the mystery of God and all that we do not understand, you might like to reflect on the times when it has been difficult to trust in God, and recall the times when God has been faithful. Our next hymn encourages us to have faith in God, whatever season of life we are in.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along STF 466

[Have faith in God my heart. - YouTube](#)

Have faith in God, my heart,
trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part
each promise he has made.

Have faith in God, my mind,
For when your light burns low;
God’s mercy holds a wiser plan
than you can fully know.

Have faith in God, my soul,
his cross for ever stands;
and neither life nor death can pluck
his children from his hands.

Lord Jesus, make me whole;
grant me no resting place,
until I rest, heart, mind, and soul,
the captive of your grace.

Bryn Rees (1911-1983)

Prayers of Intercession

Faithful God, we praise you for your gracious love and mercy shown to all that you have made.

In a world where many struggle, and your ways are hidden from our sight, we pray for all who find it difficult to believe that you are good.

We remember those victims of tragedy in recent days, those migrants whose lives were lost seeking to find safety, the turbulent events in Russia and ongoing Ukrainian war. There are so many other people and situations across the world in need of our prayers – we name those on our hearts before you now.....

In your church, where so many activities seem to stifle our awareness of your presence, and busyness can threaten to overwhelm us, help us to hear your voice and be faithful to you call. Where the way is unclear, make us faithful in seeking you. We pray for the mission of our local church and bring any specific prayer needs or people before God now....

In our daily lives, where we feel overlooked and neglected, or are experiencing health issues or stress, help us to know your presence. Where we do not understand the direction our lives have taken, remind us again that you are with us and that we can trust in your faithful love, bringing all of our joys and burdens to you. We name them before you now.

We join our prayers with Christians across the world as we say together the prayer Jesus taught us:

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.

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

As we offer ourselves to you anew O God, so we thank you for your many gifts given to us. Help us to be wise in sharing your blessings. Take the gifts we have given for your glory, and use them and us for the work of your Kingdom. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along STF 238

[Lead Us, Heavenly Father, Lead Us](#)

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us:
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

James Edmeston (1791-1867)

Closing Blessing

A blessing from Ephesians 3.20-21:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

Church Copyright Licence No 30794