

Service Transcript 20th June 2021

God is able

Hello and welcome to our Sunday Service for 20th June 2021. It was to be our final online service this week, but because of the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday, our return to live services at Maidstone Road will be on Sunday 25th July.

Let's come together and proclaim our great God. We'll say the words in yellow together.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

We begin in the name of the Lord who made us.

Let us sing and worship together as we praise God's holy name!

We proclaim the risen Son, who became a human being to die for us and we lift His name on high today.

Lord I lift Your name on high

Lord Jesus, we lift up Your holy name today as we come to worship You. We thank You that the name of Jesus is an exalted name because of what You achieved on the cross; for the victory over sin and death. You suffered to give us life, such was Your love for us. We acknowledge You as our risen and glorified Lord. As we open Your written word, may the Spirit open up the words to us, that You may speak into our lives what we need to hear. Challenge us and change us we pray. We ask this in Your name.

Amen.

FATHERS' DAY

Today is Fathers' Day, when we celebrate fatherhood. The experience of fatherhood is different for everyone. Many of us have had a first class experience of fatherhood, of loving parents and a stable home. Some of us watching are fathers, and grandfathers. Sadly, there may be some watching this who have had difficult experiences of fatherhood, of abusive, neglected or absentee fathers. Some of us have sadly lost our fathers.

So what is being a father really like? I hesitate to generalise, but I must say that a few incidents in this little video on Fatherhood did resonate with me! Sometimes being a father is fun! Although I must say there are other times when urrrr!

So what is the essence of fatherhood? Surely it is being a loving parent and that's reflected in our loving Father in heaven. A loving Father always wants the best for his children and even when they get to be adults is always there for them even when they pull in a different direction.

This is an age where not just fathers but mothers and grandparents need to set our children a positive example because we live in a world where they are bombarded from all sides by information and ideas that have varying levels of truth, where our behaviour as human beings is changing our climate and environment at increasing speed and where God is little recognised and worshipped any more.

If we are Christian parents, then we must set the example and be people of the highest moral integrity, be praying parents and reflect the love and presence of God in our lives.

Let's pray for our parents and grandparents now, that they may be that example.

Heavenly Father,
you entrusted your Son Jesus,
the child of Mary,
to the care of Joseph, an earthly father.
Bless all fathers
as they care for their families.
Give them strength and wisdom,
tenderness and patience;
support them in the work they have to do,
protecting those who look to them,
as we look to you for love and salvation,
through Jesus Christ our rock and defender.
Amen.

The thing we most want and need to share with our children is our faith in Christ. This is a song about what being in Christ means and the destiny that we have in Him. In this dangerous world, God calls us to walk with Him and we are going to explore that shortly.

Now is the time

WALKING WITH GOD IN A DANGEROUS WORLD

We have been looking at the life of Abram during our services recently. Abram had been called by God to leave the comfort and security of Ur and Harran to move to the land of Canaan, where God had promised the land to him and his descendants. He knew that moving to that land was fraught with dangers but he was a prosperous man and well equipped with what life there would throw at him – or was he?

We saw how Abram first celebrated his journey by raising altars to the Lord, but when the going got tough and famine came, rather than trusting God he trusted his own judgement and went to Egypt, where he wasn't called, where he got himself into a web of deception that got him thrown out of Egypt and he returned to Canaan. He lived dangerously, got burnt and left Egypt with his integrity in tatters. What happened next? Here's Rhiannon to read chapter 13 of Genesis to us.

READING: Genesis 13

This is a story of grace. God graciously restored Abram – in fact he was blessed with even more wealth as he moved around Canaan. He returned after a while to the place where he first raised

his second altar. But it wasn't long before his faithfulness to God and integrity would be tested again. This week and next week we are going to explore how Abram was faced with another challenge and how he made the right decisions this time, with different outcomes even though he had to live dangerously.

It all started when the pastures in Canaan were too meagre to support Abram and Lot's growing flocks and conflict between their herders ensued. If they were to stay in Canaan, the obvious thing was that they split up so they didn't compete with one another.

Abram gave Lot first pickings and he chose to leave Canaan and moved to the Jordan valley and the plains around the cities on the far side of the Dead Sea in the land we now call Jordan. I wonder whether Abram had that in mind when he made the offer to Lot. I suspect not, knowing what they were like. There was space in the Jordan valley and Transjordan lands, but Abram stayed put in the hills of Canaan where there were less people to trade with and less grass for his herds. Besides, the cities of the plain had a certain reputation. And there was that promise

Of course, as soon as Lot left God confirms again to him the promises made to him previously. Staying in Canaan, the land of God's promises was exactly the right thing to do: it was where God wanted him to be. He had not been like Lot and chosen to move to somewhere more lucrative. We know from ensuing passages, that Abram was blessed of God for staying where he was called.

Are we where God wants us to be, doing what God wants us to do? As we come out of the pandemic and look towards the future, it's time to re-affirm God's call for us. It's important to do that in all areas of our lives not just to where we worship and what service we do as part of the church. We are part of a wider community in Felixstowe. We are all part of families. As God's people, we are salt and light in our community and to our families. Are we where we should be and doing what we should do? We need to ask God to affirm that in our lives as he did Abram.

This is because our spiritual welfare and probably our general welfare depends on it and bad decisions can shipwreck our faith. Lot had been part of Abram's family the whole of his life and accompanied him to Canaan. Now he took the opportunity to strike out by himself and he decided to make a total break and leave Canaan for the cities of the plain that had a certain reputation which both he and Abram were aware of. There were strong economic advantages to trade there, but of one of its chief cities there chapter 13 chillingly says *Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.* That was the city where Lot pitched up.

There was danger for Lot in moving there. Did he not consider that? Perhaps he thought that he would just live there and do business and not be affected by their idolatry, by their greed and their reputation for sexual immorality. Whatever he thought, by the next chapter, he's no longer a nomadic herder, he's living in Sodom and probably petty rich on it.

What's most dangerous about our modern society is the way in which it's values are quite the reverse of what God calls His people to. It's a world where self-promotion, acquisition of wealth, the importance of status materialism, the promotion of one's personal rights over others are to the fore and are leading to even wider gaps between rich and poor, the exploitation of the weakest in society, injustice towards the powerless and the destruction of the environment.

And everything about that is diametrically opposed to the teaching of scripture and the values Christ taught us. So when we ask questions as to whether we are doing God's will and following

God's way and excellent measure of our motive is the basic principle of Christ – agape (love), putting the needs and welfare of others before our own, even if that disadvantages us to do so. It really disadvantaged Jesus: He died because He loved us and desired that we find forgiveness and real life, eternal life.

We are in the same business of Jesus. It's about bringing life to others, in bringing good news and being good news in a world that's bad news. We can either be like the world, or bring God's kingdom into it.

One of the positive things I've seen in Felixstowe in the past few years are the ways in which Christians have been making a difference to the lives of some of the poorest, most disadvantaged and most isolated people in the town. We can make an impact, need to make an impact because Covid-19 has shattered many lives in this town – and by the power of God we will make a difference.

One of the problems of being locked down for so long is that our world has been reduced to our homes and a limited number of people – with the rest being reduced to screen size. It's easy to forget who we are and what God has called us to do as a church.

As God affirmed Abram's call to Canaan let's ask God to affirm the call He has given us to serve and follow Him, to recognise where we have been like Lot and compromised with the world and to ask Him to re-affirm the faith in us if that has become hazy over the last year. Here's a song to help us.

Eoghan Heaslip – Lord have mercy

CONFESSION

So let's bring what we have thought about before God. If our faith has become hazy or we have struggled in past few months and doubts have slipped in let's come and bring this to Him and find forgiveness afresh as we move on in our faith. We have a few moments to reflect and pray.

SILENCE

Father these have been difficult months where our faith has been under pressure in different ways. We find in You the same forgiveness that you have always shown those who come before you. Help us to walk in the power of Your Spirit to live and to serve in a way which glorifies You. We ask this in Jesus' name.
Amen.

PRAYER

Let's move on to some wider intercessions. I've had the next video for some time. It's a poem by Phil Knox called Lament and was written at the end of last year. It is a lament for how the world suddenly changed for all of us a year ago.

VIDEO

It's a question we can answer a little more clearly now as we come to an end of restrictions, although Covid-19 is going to still be with us for some time yet. Let's give thanks for that, but also pray that progress will be made sharing the vaccination with other countries particularly the poorest nations on Earth.

Father

We look back at the past year with many mixed emotions. It has been eventful. We think on all the sad times: of friends we lost to the virus, those who suffer hardship through lost jobs and changed circumstances for those who have suffered from isolation, those that had vital operations postponed, those of Your people who have missed the fellowship of others. We lift ourselves before you – bring hope to hurting lives, bring restoration we pray.

We pray for wisdom for our Governments and others to share vaccines generously to countries on earth that are still suffering high infection and death rates. Thank you for the way in which many Christian organisations in the poorest countries have found ways of getting vaccines into places when Governments have failed to do so.

We thank you too for the positives of the past year; for time spent with You, for the appreciation of Your world as we have needed to slow down; for a chance to take stock of life and our direction. We pray that you will affirm our faith and our calling to follow and serve. We ask that we may understand Your will and way for our own personal faith and for our life together as Your church. Please help us to appreciate afresh the blessings You give us day by day. May we appreciate the fellowship we have one another so much more. Build your church at Maidstone Road afresh we pray.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen

As many of you know part of the ceiling of the church building collapsed recently and we are going to have to get it fixed but that won't affect our restart on 25th July. However, please do pray that we will be able to expedite repairs as soon as possible. We are going to have to fund most of the repair ourselves so pray that the Lord will provide the resources we need to get it fixed.

Father, as we plan to re-open the church building for face to face worship on 25th July, may all the arrangements we need to make run smoothly. Thank You for the opportunity we have to meet again to worship together. Help us to appreciate the call You give us to be salt and light in our community. Help each of us to adapt to what will be a new situation after it being so long since we last met together in one place as Your church.

Let's take a few moments to pray for one another and for those in the fellowship we know need prayer at the moment.

Personal Prayer

Father, You are able to do more than we can ask our imagine. Take our prayers this morning and work in the lives of those we have lifted before You, to Your glory.

Amen.

As we close this morning let's affirm the basis of our faith as we sing this song.

We believe in God the Father

Let's close by saying this amazing benediction that I use often. It's from God's word – take it and pray it for yourself.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

I'll bid you goodbye for this week. Stay safe and God bless you and leave you with some notices.

Now is the time chorus reprise with notices.

There are no notes for discussion and reflection this week