

# Service Transcript

## 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021

*Service Leader: Janet Rhea*

*Speaker: Mark Reid*

### **Welcome and opening words**

Merciful God: We come together to worship longing for tenderness because this world can be hard.

We come longing for light because our lives are crowded with shadows.

We come desperately needing direction.

Fill us this morning with your spirit who is our peace and our path.

### **1740 Come let us sing**

Come, let us sing to the One, to the Father of life,

Whose light fills the earth like the sun; Come, tell of the wonders He's done.

Great is the world He has made, are the mysteries untold, is His measureless power of old;

Come, come let us sing to our God.

*Chorus: To our God, who is able to strengthen us in His grace*

*Beyond all we imagine, be all glory and praise, be all praise.*

Come, let us sing to the One, to the Saviour of life,

Find the fullness of God in the Son; Come, tell of the wonders He's done.

Wild is the mercy of Christ, is the richness of grace, is the unending life we embrace; Come,

come let us sing to our God. *Chorus:*

Come, let us sing to the One, to the Spirit of life,

Leading us in the way of the Son; Come, tell of the wonders He's done.

Strong is the Spirit within, is the boldness to speak, is the power to run when we're weak;

Come, come let us sing to our God. *Chorus:*

### **A thought:**

Scientists grew trees in a sealed biosphere and could not work out why they kept falling over before they matured. It turns out that whilst they had provided the perfect growing environment, it was lacking wind, which provides the stress to ensure the trees grow strong enough to support themselves. Whilst no-one likes stress and pressure, they are the things that test us and make us strong. Perhaps you have found the last few months to have been like being in a biosphere. Sealed off. Now as life becomes "normal" perhaps you are fearful or more stressed than you were.

I had a friend with Cancer which was painful and difficult to treat. Her treatments made her very unwell, but she told me that she found rest when she focused on small things. She said God provided her with another focus every day and that the small things made her grateful and eased her pain. She lived "In the moment". On a visit one day she told me she had been blessed with a bed by the window. To be honest I thought the view was dire. A tiny ledge and the wall of another building. But my friend said "Look at the sparrows that come and settle. God reminds me that he has hold of me just like the sparrows and that I matter to him much much more" In that situation she saw God and was grateful. It eased her difficulty and she came out the other end of the treatment and actually lived nearly 20 more years to a ripe

old age. But the lessons she learnt made her stronger. Being thankful is the opposite to what we would expect to feel with cancer or any other of life's problems and stresses. So we have to practice it. Lets do that as we sing our next song.

### **524 Thank you Lord**

Thank You, Lord, for this fine day, Thank You, Lord, for this fine day,  
Thank You, Lord, for this fine day, Right where we are.

*Chorus: Alleluia, praise the Lord! Alleluia, praise the Lord!  
Alleluia, praise the Lord, right where we are.*

Thank You, Lord, for loving us, Thank You, Lord, for loving us,  
Thank You, Lord, for loving us, Right where we are. *Chorus*

Thank You, Lord, for giving us peace, Thank You, Lord, for giving us peace,  
Thank You, Lord, for giving us peace, Right where we are. *Chorus*

Thank You, Lord, for setting us free, Thank You, Lord, for setting us free,  
Thank You, Lord, for setting us free, Right where we are. *Chorus*

### **Reflection and Prayer**

We have been apart so long I thought it would be good to share this reflection I came across. I do Lectio 365 and commend it to you. It has morning and evening reflections and recently joined with "Thy Kingdom come"

### **Eph 1:18-19**

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Imagine sitting with a crowd of people some of whom you know some of whom you don't. There has been a death and the will is about to be read. You have been told you are to receive an inheritance. What could it be? Why are all these other people here? As the will is read you understand that part of the inheritance we are receiving is each other.

Let us pray:

God I pray that you would not only help me to see my way forward, but that you would help me to appreciate those who are with me along the way: friends, family, chance strangers whose lives unexpectedly intersect with mine. Even people I find difficult to understand or get along with. I lift those on my heart to you today in the silence.

### **Come all you Vagabonds.**

Come all you vagabonds, come all you 'don't belongs'  
Winners and losers, come, people like me.  
Come all you travellers tired from the journey,  
Come wait a while, stay a while, welcomed you'll be.

Come all you questioners, looking for answers  
And searching for reasons and sense in it all;  
Come all you fallen, and come all you broken,

Find strength for your body and food for your soul.

*Chorus: Come to the feast, there is room at the table.*

*Come let us meet in this place with the King of all kindness who welcomes us in  
With the wonder of love, and the power of grace,  
The wonder of love, and the power of grace.*

Come those who worry 'Bout houses and money,  
And all those who don't have a care in the world;  
From every station and orientation, the helpless, the hopeless, the young and the old.  
*Chorus*

Come all believers and dreamers and schemers,  
And come all you restless just searching for home;  
Movers and shakers and givers and takers,  
The happy, the sad and the lost and alone.

Come self-sufficient with wearied ambition,  
And come those who feel at the end of the road.  
Fiery debaters and religion haters, accusers, abusers, the hurt and ignored. *Chorus*

### **Continuing prayer:**

God I pray for the church, the rag tag band of believers and sinners. The lofty and the lowly alike. Collectively help us to appreciate the richness, the breath taking beauty of all of your people. May we all come to know our inheritance to the full in you, who we are together and whose we are together. As we begin to meet up again, some of us after little or no contact, please be with us, healing wounds, re-building relationships and renewing your people at Maidstone road Baptist church. Give us wisdom and patience to adjust back to being together.

### **54 Brother sister let me serve you**

Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;  
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, we are brothers on the road;  
We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ light for you in the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping, when you laugh I'll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony,  
Born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you let me be as Christ to you;  
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

### **Reading: Genesis 12:1-19**

**12** The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

<sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.”<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. <sup>5</sup> He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. <sup>6</sup> Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring<sup>[c]</sup> I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup> From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. <sup>10</sup> Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. <sup>11</sup> As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. <sup>12</sup> When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. <sup>13</sup> Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.” <sup>14</sup> When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. <sup>15</sup> And when Pharaoh’s officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. <sup>16</sup> He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels. <sup>17</sup> But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram’s wife Sarai. <sup>18</sup> So Pharaoh summoned Abram. “What have you done to me?” he said. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife? <sup>19</sup> Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!”

### **Sermon: Stepping out in Faith**

It wasn’t a long journey by modern standards on good roads – about 10 hours solid driving on modern motorways. But then it was an 800 mile long ride over dusty tracks – taking weeks – but at least the direct journey overland was possible in the 3rd millenium BC, because it isn’t today.

#### **JOZEF MOLNAR PICTURE**

This was the journey of Abram, his family, his servants and his herders from Harran – now in south eastern Turkey – to Canaan, a distance of some 800 miles. There were plenty of tracks down to Canaan his time but the civil war in Syria and the geopolitics of the Middle East make the direct overland journey impossible today.

#### **MAP**

As I said last time, the wider family had originally come with their father Terah from Ur, in the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers up to Harran, also known as Carrhae which was a much older civilisation than the Sumerian Empire the family left.

We have no reason given as to why the family left Ur. What we do know is that Abram’s father Terah had intended to relocate to Canaan but they ended up at the half-way point: Harran. We know nothing of their life in Harran but we must surmise that as it was a rich

city, Terah's family lived comfortably and profited from being there. We also know from the passage we read, that they were not urbanites, but were herders, and would have done well providing food for a sizeable town like Harran. We know from the remainder of Abram's life, that he was a man of both wealth and power.

Although we have no idea why Terah left Ur, we do know that Abram had been called to leave his family and go to a land God was showing him, which we know to be Canaan. We don't know when Abram received that call, other than it was Abram's call, not Terah's, and it was only when Terah had died that Abram went on to Canaan.

As we said last week, the land south west of Harran was an undiscovered country to Terah's family. Neither Terah or Abram had the full picture, only perhaps stories of those arriving from there to trade in Harran or Ur. To migrate to Canaan was a step of faith however you want to see it.

### A STEP OF FAITH

To me, story has a freshness about it as we hear of migrants attempting to get to out of conflict zones or oppressive countries to the relative freedom of the Europe and the UK. They are in search of safety, a better life. They feel it is worth losing everything to risk getting here, even if that is on a leaky inflatable dinghy in the Mediterranean or The Channel. Their step of faith is that they believe that however bad the journey, the destination is worth the risk, even if their welcome is less than friendly.

Our title picture this morning was of the famous high wire walker, Charles Blondin who entered into fame when he walked many times over Niagara Falls in 1861. It was an immensely dangerous thing to do but Blondin was an experienced high wire artist, and was confident in his ability, so that the risks were worth it for the fame and fortune it brought him.

Abram's journey was quite different because he was motivated by the call of God but it still involved a step of faith because he was still risking himself, Sarai, Lot, his entourage and his wealth in livestock to go to a country he knew where his welcome may be less than friendly and full of unknowns. Someone once said that faith is spelt RISK. Perhaps he was doing what Terah had feared to do – to risk all on a departure from civilisation into lawless Canaan which has potential benefits apart from God's call even though it was effectively the WILD WEST..

The writer to the Hebrews tells us of the nature of Abram's journey of faith Hebrews 11:8

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

If we are in Christ, God WILL call each of us to make steps of faith throughout our journey of life. It's how we grow and thrive as God's people. Some will be large steps like Abram's all or nothing trip to Canaan, or it may be small steps of faith – praying for someone, committing to serving others, becoming involved in new ministries within the church.

To be honest, my experience of being a Christian is that we grow most, and by that I mean grow closer to God, when we accept his challenges to step out in faith. But faith is always spelt RISK, not SAFE. Are safe Christians shallow Christians? That's one for you to answer this week.

As we feel challenged by God to step out in faith, we need to do one most important thing. After reading all about Abram's call in verses 1 to 3, we read in verse 4 ... Abram went, as the

Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He went. He did something. Oh, and I forgot to mention that he was 75 when he left Harran on his risky enterprise. So if you think you're too old to receive a call from God – you're not. If you're older than 75, remember that Moses was 80 when he was called to return to Egypt to confront Pharaoh and led Israel for 40 years after that. You're never too old to serve. And if you are tut, tutting me for saying this, then that's exactly what Moses did to God. He was full of the "but Lord's".

We are weeks away from re-opening our Church building. We are going back to problems and challenges; and to use a computing term we need to grab the thing by the bootstraps and get the worship of God and our mission and service to our community fully up and running again. Our building and activities need a reboot, and it's going to involve all of us including all the Abram and Moses aged people. We can either be Abrams and just get to it, or like Moses and waste God's time and ours going "but Lord!" What's it going to be?

Walking the walk of faith starts by making the first step; the rest follows. I remember that there was once a Bible study course and book by John Ortberg that said "If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat." God wants you to trust that He is faithful and to do that, we need to take that first step.

#### A SMOOTH JOURNEY

So Abram went. And all was hunky-dory. A straightforward and safe journey. No recorded run-ins with the Canaanites and a successful first camp at the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. It was a spiritual experience for Abram as God appeared and affirmed Abram with this promise: "To your offspring I will give this land." Abram celebrates and worships by building an altar. Abram then moves on and sites his entourage again and builds another altar. He marks his journey by recognising the God who had brought him there.

How often do we thank God and worship when all goes right and He affirms His presence in our lives? In truth it should be every day when we reflect on it, but how often are our prayers a list of demands rather than words of worship? I'm glad we finished Unanswered Prayer and Thy Kingdom Come with a testimony session. If we want to have a dynamic faith, one that drives us to make greater steps of faith, then recognising and celebrating what God is doing will bring us to the worship that will take us forward in our relationship with God.

To use an old phrase we need to take time to "count our blessings", be surprised by what we find and praise God. Sankey's hymn book had a unique hymn that had the phrase "count your blessings name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done." Actually, it's a good discipline to do frequently or we end up in "unanswered prayer" situations, or worse we stop trusting God and start making stupid decisions that we live to regret.

#### A STUPID DECISION

Which is exactly what seems to have happened to Abram in the second half of the chapter. Abram moves to the Negev, the semi-desert in the south of Canaan and a drought then sets in which is particularly disastrous if you are a nomadic herder and the little grass that's there dries up. You notice that nothing is mentioned of the Lord or the setting up of altars in the Negev.

Abram was called to Canaan. He could have backtracked northwards to the wetter part of Canaan, but instead he opted for the riskier strategy of going to the better watered land of

Egypt where God hadn't called him. Never take risks God hasn't called you to take. God's risks turn out to be gems, our risks are more of a lottery.

Abram makes his second mistake as he is welcomed warmly to Egypt, by lying about Sarai's status to them. That was risk number two that God hadn't called him to make. He argued that deception was necessary, to stop the Egyptians stealing all his stuff. It's clear from this passage that they had no intention of doing so but thought that Sarai was an unattached woman and available for Pharaoh. Pharaoh gifted Abram for presumably adding Sarai to his harem. Abram had every opportunity to confess the deception and get her out of the mess, but he benefited from his infidelity to Sarai so he let it go on. Money, money, money. Kerching! That was a truly low thing for Abram to do. And God saw it all acted and it ended up with a furious Pharaoh berating Abram for the deception.

Thankfully for Abram, he got to keep his wife and all his stuff. After all the blessings of moving to Canaan, Abram showed how low he was prepared just to increase his wealth. And it wasn't the only time he did it either.

However much we walk in the Spirit it is easy to fall into walking in the flesh, particularly when we are on a high, having received God's blessings. We have done some pretty good stuff under God's leading over the past few years but the last year has been one of seeming drought (actually there have been some pretty good bits too). It is easy in difficult times to just walk away and be discouraged. Or just do our won thing without thinking or in desperation. Perhaps you have felt like that. Maybe you've been a bit of an Abram and got caught up in stuff you shouldn't have. For many Christians lockdown has been a time when things have gone wrong for whatever reason: marriage breakdowns, lost jobs, hardship, drinking too much, gambling more and other things. Lives and families are hurting. What do we do? Let's go back to Abram.

The end of this story is a happy one. By God's grace Abram got out of Egypt relatively unscathed and God blessed Him as he again moved into Canaan and got back on track with God. If life has been tough over these months and you feel low spiritually, remember this: in Christ, you are a child of God; you are valued, you are loved. Allow Him to pick you up, to put you back on the tracks and lead you where He wants you to be, doing what He wants you to do. That may seem hard, but God's way is the only way for God's people.

I said right at the beginning that faith is spelt RISK but a risk worth taking when God calls us to follow Him. We have a challenging future, but as we have discovered in the past when we discern God's will and follow it, the kingdom extends and we as God's people are drawn to Him.

In the coming days and weeks, let's seek God, let's discern His way, let's follow it however strange or even risky it may be and let's build His kingdom here in the land He's called us to minister in.

## CONFESSION

Let's pray

Father, as your Church, as people you have called to worship and serve you at Maidstone Road Baptist Church, we affirm again Your call. We take time to confess those things that we have fallen short of over these last few months as we have passed through the frustrations of lockdown.

Silence

Thank you for your grace, love and mercy that like Abram, you take us in our weakness and guide us into Your promised land when we take Your hand and go with You.

We also take a few moments to count our blessings received over the past months. May these fresh shoots in our lives grow as you use us in the coming months

### COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Father, as we re-open the church buildings, may You remove the practical obstacles that prevent us from doing so right now,

May we accept the joy of meeting one another again to worship and never again take one another for granted.

May you guide us into spreading Your kingdom in new ways as well as doing what we used to do more effectively.

May we take the new skills we have learned over the last year, particularly in the field of technology and use them to enrich our more traditional means of ministry.

In everything Lord, build Your church at Maidstone Road

In Jesus' name

Amen

### **Song: Oceans**

**Closing prayer:** Oh Lord our God, steer the ship of our life to yourself, the quiet harbour of all storm stressed souls. Show us the course which we are to take. Renew in us the spirit of calm. Let your spirit curb our fickleness; guide and strengthen us to perform what is for our own good, to keep your commandments and ever rejoice in your glorious presence. Grant that our lives will reflect your glory to others this week. Amen

### **For Reflection and Discussion**

Read Genesis 12

1. Think of times in your life when God has called you to do something big that would involve life change or serious risk? What helped you understand the call was genuine and gave you confidence to move forward? What happened next?
2. "Faith is spelt RISK not SAFE". Are Christians who play it safe spiritually shallow? Are there any times in your life where you regret playing it safe? Or perhaps times when you were relieved that you did play it safe?
3. How often do you "count your blessings:" how important is thankfulness and worship in your prayer life?
4. Think of times in your life when you acted without discerning God's will, or even knew what you were doing was wrong? What was the outcome?

Take time to pray, confessing times when God called and you didn't follow, or when you knowingly acted outside of God's purposes for you. Praise Him for His love and restoring grace that He brings us back from the sins and big mistakes that so easily beset us when we walk in the flesh and nit in the Spirit.

