

Worship at Home - Sunday 16th March 2025

Trust in the Lord

Call to worship

Loving God, we come before you to explore the promises you make to us. You always have our best interests at heart, and so we trust in you.

StF no. 20 *Be still for the presence of the Lord*

1 Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found-
we stand on holy ground.
Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.

2 Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight-
our radiant King of light!
Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

3 Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place:
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace-
no work too hard for him.
In faith receive from him.
Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

CCL 821965 David J Evans

Prayers of Adoration, Praise and Confession

We adore you, Lord. You promise to protect us, now and always, keeping us safe and secure. You promise to teach us and to be our guide and helper. We look to you in all things. We trust in what you have already given and what is yet to come. **Amen.**

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise you for this day. We thank you for the many ways you speak to us: through your Word, visions, dreams and other people. Thank you that you see the bigger picture, the whole story from start to finish. Each day you open a new page in life's book, giving us promises for now and for what lies ahead. Thank you that unwavering trust in you banishes all shadows and uncertainties. Help us to walk in faith. All praise to you Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Lord, you gave Abraham a promise that seemed far-fetched at first, yet you confirmed it in holy visions. Lord, we are sorry when we fail to believe in your promises, when we

think we must have misheard you. Forgive us for doubting, and for not trusting enough. Help us to have faith like Abraham and deepen our trust in you, even when your promises have yet to be fulfilled.

Forgive us when we lose heart. Help us to wait upon you and bless us with faith that nothing can shake. We ask this in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ who came to forgive sinners like us. **Amen**

Readings: *Genesis 15: 1-8*

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” ² But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” ⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” ⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. ⁷ He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.” ⁸ But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

Romans 4: 13, 16 -22

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. ¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Sermon

Text: Genesis 15, verse 6, ‘Abram put his trust in the Lord’.

The story of Abram, more familiarly known as Abraham, one of the great patriarchs of Israel, is doubtless well known to you, but it represents an important part of the early history of God’s people, and I think it still speaks powerfully to us today. Not least in the troubled times in which we have been living of late, and which have been plunged into crisis by the erratic behaviour of the American President, Donald Trump. The chaos is a reminder that, ultimately, we need to put our trust in the Lord, even when his promises are difficult to believe, which was certainly how Abram came to regard them.

In Genesis chapter 12, just after we encounter Abram for the first time, God calls him to leave his current abode in Haran (which is located in present-day Turkey). Abram set out for an undisclosed destination, apparently quite willingly, even though he was already 75 years old. To be sure, like his family and many others in those days, he had

led a nomadic existence, originating further to the east, in present-day Iraq. Nevertheless, it was a significant act of faith to set out in those circumstances; Abram evidently did put his trust in the Lord. When Abram arrived in Canaan (in present-day Israel-Palestine), God promised him the land, but famine compelled him to move south to Egypt.

When Abram returned to Canaan, he settled at Hebron, and God made the promise he repeated in our Bible passage today, that Abram would have many descendants. It was only at this point that the obedient Abram began to have doubts and, not surprisingly for someone now in his eighties, he pointed out to God that giving him the land would be pointless because he had no heirs to inherit it. God, however, reassured him that he would have descendants and Abram responded by firmly putting his trust in the Lord, as our text declares.

In verse 5 of our passage from Genesis chapter 12, Abram heard the Lord speaking to him and, taking him outside, God invited him to look up at the night-sky and count the stars. I'm afraid that if you tried that in our part of Cheshire you wouldn't see too many of them with the naked eye, even on a clear night, on account of light pollution.

However, on a memorable visit I made to Morocco, in North Africa, some years ago, far from any towns, I saw thousands of stars in the sky, and I was absolutely amazed by it. God is dramatically demonstrating to Abram that his promise of becoming the father of a great nation will be as real as that star-studded sky. And, indeed, we know that many of Abram's descendants were great 'stars', such as David or Solomon.

As we go on to read, later in Genesis, a legitimate son, Isaac, was eventually born and, as he once more repeated his promise that Abram would be the ancestor of many nations, God gave him the new name of Abraham, by which he is much better known: Abraham literally means 'ancestor of many nations'.

It's a long and sometimes complicated story, but that's precisely the first point we should take from it: God fulfils his promises, though it may take a little time and we may not always live to see the results. I have chosen the example of Gladys Aylward as a good illustration. Once again, a personal recollection, since I still vividly remember her speaking in my native Bristol when I was in my teens. Her small stature made her hard to make out in the large hall! She was called by God to be a missionary in China, but the missionary society was dissatisfied with her progress on a preparatory training course, and so she decided to make her own way to China, where she spread the faith and was given a new name, which in Chinese meant 'the virtuous one'. However, the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s interrupted her mission and then the anti-Christian Communist Revolution made it impossible for her to continue in mainland China, but she spent her later years in what is now Taiwan. However, despite official discouragement by the regime, Christianity is now growing fast in China: Gladys Aylward's legacy are converts as numerous as the stars ...

Of course, there is another message for us here: if God calls us to do something for him, he will keep his part of the covenant he makes. It may not be easy, it may not go according to our plans, but we must put our trust in God. St Paul thus highlights the example of Abraham in his great Letter to the Romans, because Abraham trusted God, 'believing and hoping, even when there was no reason for hoping.' Those promises were eventually fulfilled and Abraham was saved, as we will be, when we follow in the footsteps of St Paul, who became the founder of many churches that would spread far beyond the Mediterranean world to which he ministered to reach millions of souls.

Lent is generally seen as a time for abstinence, but Christian Aid once came up with a slogan which I have used ever since: 'Lent is not a time for giving up'. So why not think

of the next four weeks as a time for taking something on, however modest that might be – visiting or contacting old friends, for instance. For another lesson that we might draw from the story of Abraham is that we may be called to God's service late in our lives. However advanced in years we may be, God has not finished with us yet. Finally, as the author of Psalm 146 says, 'Do not place your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help'. Instead, like Abraham, put your trust in the Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, our light and our salvation, we pray for your help when life becomes a struggle and the way ahead is uncertain. We pray for those who are caught up in war and unrest. For those undergoing persecution under repressive regimes. For those working among refugees. For those working to provide food, medicine and shelter to the hungry, sick and homeless. *Hear our prayers, as we put our trust in you.*

Then we would pray for those weakened by infirmity or illness, afraid of what the future may hold. For those who have lost a companion, or a family member, and whose lives are overshadowed by grief and loneliness. *Hear our prayers, as we put our trust in you.*

We pray too for those haunted by doubt and despair, facing the future with little confidence. For those eager for employment but cast into inactivity. For those seeking a purpose in life, but held back by fear of commitment and a lack of faith. *Hear our prayers, as we put our trust in you.*

Finally, we pray for ourselves. Give us the courage to step into the unknown, the trust to follow where you lead, and the strength to persevere faithfully to our journey's end. For we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who, for our sake, set his face firmly towards Jerusalem, knowing that suffering and death awaited him. And we pray as he taught us:

The Lord's Prayer.

StF no. 466 *Have faith in God*

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

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

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

4 Lord Jesus, make me whole;
Grant me no resting place,
Until I rest, heart, mind, and soul,
The captive of your grace.

CCL821965 Bryn Rees

Final prayer:

Dear Lord, throughout the ages you have kept your promises. In the days that lie before us, give us renewed confidence to trust in you, and to fulfil the promises we make to others. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest and remain with us, always. **Amen.**

This worship service has been prepared by Dr. Malcolm Crook