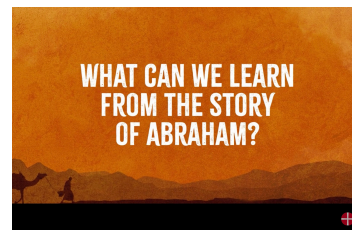


**Dorset South & West. Written Service.**  
**Sunday 14th July 2024.**  
**Bible Month... Genesis The God who calls and blesses.**



Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.

**Call to worship:**

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.

**STF 51**

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
there is no shadow of turning with thee;  
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;  
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:

Great is thy faithfulness!  
Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,  
join with all nature in manifold witness  
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

**Prayer of adoration.**

God of new beginnings, because you come among us to make us whole, we approach you in this time of worship with delight and trepidation: glad to be comforted, ready to be challenged; knowing your personal touch and your generous love for all.

We come to worship with those who have nothing and need more, with those who have all they require and look for nothing, with those trapped and suffering in the gap dividing rich and poor. May what we receive in this service be shared with all, Spiritual food for our bodies, minds and souls.  
That we might glorify your name and know the blessings of your presence. **Amen.**

**Prayer of confession (based on STF 399)**

When we have let deep despair cast out all light and found our hope is wearing thin;  
When we have let greed dictate how we live,  
come Spirit, burn as living flame, prompt us to act to end this shame and cast apathy away.

When we have let colour, lifestyle, creed or name cause groundless hate and fear;  
When we have let guilt and fear tear us apart and faith's a bitter thing;  
come Spirit, weave a web of peace, that our prejudice and violence might cease.

Reveal to us God's purpose, come Spirit, dance with gentle grace,  
shine through the dullness we embrace. Forgive us recommission us  
and make God's colours, the colours we sing. **Amen**

**Bible Reading: Genesis 20:1-18**

Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her. But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman." Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die."

Early the next morning Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How

have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done.” And Abimelek asked Abraham, “What was your reason for doing this?” Abraham replied, “I said to myself, ‘There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’ Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.”’”

Then Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelek said, “My land is before you; live wherever you like.”

To Sarah he said, “I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offence against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.” Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek’s household from conceiving because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.

### **Reflection** Not again! 🤔

If you’re following the readings this Bible month you will be thinking haven’t we heard this before? In Genesis 12 Abraham passes Sarah off as his sister as a means of self preservation! So this isn’t the first time Abraham’s told this lie about Sarah. Back in Genesis 12, he told the same lie to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Abraham knew that Sarah was very beautiful and was afraid that someone in Egypt would want her so badly as their wife that they’d kill Abraham in order to get her. So, Abraham lied and told everyone he encountered in Egypt that Sarah was just his sister. So, acting on that information, Pharaoh took Sarah to be his wife. However, when God afflicted Pharaoh and his household with plagues, the truth came out and they were forced to leave Egypt in disgrace.

Here we are again, just a few chapters later, thirty years on and Abraham is doing the same thing again! To be fair Sarah is his half sister. They share the same Father but not Mother. Abraham, however is still not owning up to the fact that she is his wife. Also as we will see later this was a premeditated lie.

Sarah is 89 years old and not to demean her, why would King Abimelech want her as his bride? Probably Abimelech wanted her in his harem to cement an alliance with the wealthy and powerful Abraham. Later, Abimelech did enter into an alliance with Abraham (21:22-34). Thus while Sarah was not in the flower of her youth, she was an attractive woman whose family ties could help Abimelech politically.

How sad to see even in the revered Abraham, that old habits die hard! When we look at our Bible heroes so often they are just like us and we see their faults and failures despite their closeness to God. One commentator said of David, “his heart was more often out of tune than his harp!”. Even though we know certain things are wrong and we know the effect they have on our relationship with God and we know that we’ll regret them, for some reason, we keep repeating those mistakes. For some of us, it’s losing our temper. For others, it’s lies, what ever shade we call them; white or ?. For others it’s the lure of participating in gossip. And on and on we could go. Certain abuses, being deceptive, holding grudges, speaking carelessly, and dozens of other things. We all struggle with certain wrong tendencies that cause us difficulty again and again. Even though we might desperately try to put an end to those ways, we find ourselves repeating the same mistakes and apologising, promising and trying hard not to do that thing again ....and oops! Not again! We try to justify ourselves, “it’s not my fault”, “if things had been different”. Or we claim we are just stretching the truth! Or we find justifiable reasons for why we had to act as we did. The hardest word to say is, “sorry”. And indeed old habits die hard.

Why is it so hard? Is it forgetfulness? We read about forgetfulness in this passage and indeed in the whole of scripture. God’s forgetfulness. When we confess our sins he forgives us and forgets our sins. We might find it hard to forgive and forget, but our Heavenly Father’s forgiveness is so complete that He gives us a whole new page in our lives, a clean sheet! Christians are not perfect but they are forgiven, when they confess their sins.

There is another aspect of forgetfulness in the passage. Abraham forgets that God is trust worthy and will protect him. That’s not to say all life’s problems will be deflected from him. But God will be with him in every situation. We often speak about Abraham as, ‘Father Abraham’. I remember when I was quite young my Father taking me to the swimming pool every weekend and my trusty rubber ring had to come too. Dad would patiently hold me up in the water and show me how to use my arms and legs and although he never let me go, soon no doubt I would be embarrassing him and demanding my life preserver. Despite the numerous times Dad would say, “you don’t need that ring, I am beside you I won’t let you drown”.

I remember one Saturday morning when we had a right battle and my Dad threatened that if I insisted on using the inflatable, that’s it will be no more trips to the pool! I recall swimming off with my trusty life preserver in a right old paddy! Dad was just behind me and no way was I going to stop. Eventually he caught me and said, “you have been swimming the whole time with no air in the ring, I pulled out the stopper as you swam off. I have been right beside you just in case you needed me”. Oh! what a nit wit I was and no doubt still am. From that point on I swam without a ring and you know how I love and respect the water, all because of my loving, patient father. How much more does our Heavenly Father want us to trust Him. We will always encounter difficulties and fears but he will never let us go.

I wonder how Sarah felt in all this seemingly endless game of ping pong? One moment she is made a Sister to Abraham, then married to him and here for a second time Abraham is telling a half truth to protect his own skin! This action is selfish, callous, and repulsive. Abraham is oddly and inexplicably unconcerned about the welfare or potential physical and sexual abuse of his wife. The fact that Sarah twice goes along with this says more about her than it does about Abraham. Yet Sarah has been complicit with Abraham and said she is his Brother. We can try to justify that by remembering the lowly status of women in those times. Would she have been able to have defended herself with the truth? Most importantly we see God protects Sarah.

Why do we so often have to think the worst about people? That's certainly not how God views us. We are born into prejudices and life's experience can sometimes make us 'tar everyone with the same brush'! When you do find yourself straying down that path, try turning it around on yourself, you will soon find yourself saying not everyone is like that just because they come from...or are...!

So what about Abimelech? If Abraham was so fearful about possible consequences why go into that area? The same could be said for us and the trials and tribulations we face. Why did we put ourselves through that? Wasn't there another way? Maybe not as convenient but definitely a choice. Does Abraham have proof that the worst could happen? It is said that Kings and Prince's of the time would gather up unmarried eligible females into their harem. We don't know if this was so in Gerar.

Abraham calls them a "Godless Nation", so there must have been some evidence of troubles. Yet Abimelech says that they are an innocent nation. Also why did Abraham say, "when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."

Firstly is he trying to shift the blame on God? "Well God made me move on..."

Then to show her love to her husband, Sarah has to lie? What kind of love is that? A love that encourages someone else to sin to protect themselves and who clearly doesn't trust in God's protection. Blames God for the mess he is in and claims those who he knows little about, to be Godless.

I find it strange that Abimelech is the one who is wrongly accused and tricked into thinking Sarah was unmarried. Yet he is the one who showers Abraham with gifts of restitution? Cattle, a thousand pieces of silver and the freedom of the land. Plus of course the slaves. Which is abhorrent to us today but unfortunately part of the culture of that time. Why is Abimelech the giver of great gifts and not Abraham?

Abimelech gave these gifts to Abraham not because he was impressed by him but rather his God. When we give our gifts to church or charity, we are giving it to God. Have you ever considered how many times gifts are given in the scriptures? Even when to us, they seem undeserved. When Abraham went down to Egypt, Pharaoh gave gifts of sheep and oxen and donkeys and servants and camels to Abraham, hoping that he might be able to marry Sarah. When the truth came out that Sarah was Abraham's wife, Abraham was sent away loaded with gifts. We saw the same thing happened again with Abimelech in the land of Gerar. This month we are looking at Genesis and right from the beginning of the book we see God bestowed generous gifts on His children. Even when they strayed. Adam and Eve disobeyed but they were still given gifts to make the world a home. As we read on through scripture we see time and time again God giving abundant gifts, but we still want more or reject what we have been given. Criticising the gift and rejecting the giver. However God goes on giving. Even His only begotten Son.

If we see this world as fundamentally loaded with the gifts of our loving God, then we become givers, like Him. But if we imagine that life is threatening and full of woes, then our perspective will be very different and fearful. We may choose wrong grasping, demands born out of envy. Finding ourselves comparing what we have got with what others have. Always looking sideways. Feeling threatened, scorned, forgotten. And so everything comes down to what you see? Do you only see the hurt, the pain, the failure, the brokenness? Or do you see Jesus? Do see healing breaking out in the broken? I like to think that Abimelech had a glimpse of the love of God and could not give enough in thanksgiving.

In Matthew 5 : 44, Jesus says pray for your enemies. Here we see Abraham had lost respect in eyes of Abimelech. We may have people like that in our lives. We may have lost their respect or no matter what we do, we are not going to be able to share or talk to them but one thing we can always do is pray for them and we can bless them through our prayers. God blesses Abimelech after Abraham prays for him. We need to pray for people who we may dislike for whatever reason. It is impossible to continue to hate someone or be angry at someone if your praying for them. Anger will disappear when you pray for them. If you don't want the situation to change then maybe you have to look at your own heart and mind and pray for God's grace.

I remember Corrie Ten Boom recalling how she had preached at a Christian conference and then invited people to come forward for prayer. She was suddenly confronted by who she remembered as the worst prison guard in the concentration camp, where she and her Sister had been incarcerated and cruelly treated. She said at that moment she did not have any words to say and touching the guard in prayer seemed impossible. However she asked God to give her grace and strength and she found her hand reaching out to the guard and words of healing flowing from her. Those words and actions healed a part of her too.

In our passage we read that as Abraham prayed that God poured out healing and restoration.

What do we learn from Abraham? God calls and uses the most unlikely people with all their flaws and failures. We need to trust God and thank Him for all His many blessings. Amen.

## STF 410

Lord, your Church on earth is seeking  
your renewal from above;  
teach us all the art of speaking  
with the accent of your love.  
We would heed your great commission:  
sending us to every place -  
preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,  
serve with love and share my grace.

Freedom give to those in bondage,  
lift the burdens caused by sin.  
Give new hope, new strength and courage,

grant release from fears within:  
light for darkness; joy for sorrow;  
love for hatred; peace for strife.  
These and countless blessings follow  
as the Spirit gives new life.

In the streets of every city  
where the bruised and lonely dwell,  
let us show the Saviour's pity,  
let us of his mercy tell.  
In all lands and with all races  
let us serve, and seek to bring  
all the world to render praises,  
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

## Prayers of intercession

We pray for the Church: that it may be a sign of God's light and goodness  
in our world, and a beacon of hope for the most vulnerable.

We pray for the churches of our circuit.

For all who serve us in so many different ways. Give to them your strength and inspiration.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for world leaders: that, moved by the Holy Spirit, they may speak  
out against the scandal of hunger, injustice and corruption.

That they will seek the ways of peace and bring an end to all warfare.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who are in need in our own community.

May God grant them the hope, strength and support to lift themselves

out of poverty. We pray for all involved in food banks, caring for the homeless and helping in so many  
charitable and caring ways.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for ourselves: that through our Bible month journey,  
God will deepen our faith and knowledge of His love.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. **Amen**

## The Lord's Prayer.

### STF 634

Fight the good fight with all your might;  
Christ is your strength, and Christ your right;  
lay hold on life, and it shall be  
your joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,  
lift up your eyes, and seek his face;  
life with its way before you lies;  
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

Cast care aside; upon your guide  
lean, and his mercy will provide;  
lean, and the trusting soul shall prove  
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

Faint not nor fear, his arm is near;  
he changes not, and you are dear;  
only believe, and prove it true  
that Christ is all in all to you.

## The Blessing

May the love of the Father,  
the tenderness of the Son,  
and the presence of the Spirit,  
gladden our hearts  
and bring peace to our soul,  
this day and all ways,

**Amen.**

