

**SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL CONGREGATIONS**  
**SERVICE FOR SUNDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2020**

Welcome/Introduction

The peace of God be always with you.

Welcome to you all who are joining us for this worship service and a special welcome to anyone who is joining us for the first time.

Acknowledgement

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of this place in which we live, work and worship. To the elders and members of the Yorta Yorta nations past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship: Psalm 145: 1-14

I will proclaim your greatness, my God and king; I will thank you for ever and ever.

Every day I will thank you; I will praise you for ever and ever.

The Lord is great and is to be highly praised; his greatness is beyond understanding.

What you have done will be praised from one generation to the next; they will proclaim your mighty acts.

They will speak of your glory and majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds.

People will speak of your mighty deeds, and I will proclaim your greatness.

They will tell about all your goodness and sing about your kindness.

The Lord is loving and merciful, slow to become angry and full of constant love.

He is good to everyone and has compassion on all he made.

All your creatures, Lord, will praise you, and all your people will give you thanks.

They will speak of the glory of your royal power and tell of your might, so that everyone will know your mighty deeds and the glorious majesty of your kingdom.

Your rule is eternal, and you are king for ever.

The Lord is faithful to his promises, and everything he does is good.

He helps those who are in trouble; he lifts those who have fallen.

Hymn: 111 (TIS) 'Praise to the Lord the Almighty, the King of creation;'

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

Gracious God, for the great gift of our own lives we thank you. From before our mothers knew we existed, our hearts have beaten, and our blood has given life to all our parts. For the great gift of the life of the earth we thank you. From the tiniest ant to the largest blue whale, from the sands of the sea to the huge planetary plates, from the smallest orchid to the tallest cedar, life is everywhere moving through its never-ending cycle of life. For the vast, almost endless universe with all its wonders and mysteries we thank you. Every molecule vibrates and dances to the great hymn of the life that you have given. All that exists praises God.

God, when life springs up around us and within us, we miss it. We often react to your dynamic and ever-changing creation as if we had seen it all before. We wake to a brand-new day as if it were just the same old thing. We can go from sunrise to sunset without once being delighted by the glorious gift of being alive in this extraordinary place. We are sorry!

Declaration of Forgiveness:

God puts behind us anything that would hold us back from living and loving as fully as we are able, and God lifts the burden of sin from us.

We are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God.**

Doxology:

Readings: Genesis 24: 34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Mathew 11: 16-19, 25-30.

Genesis 24: 34 "I am the servant of Abraham," he began. 35 "The Lord has greatly blessed my master and made him a rich man. He has given him flocks of sheep and goats, cattle, silver, gold, male and female slaves, camels, and donkeys. 36 Sarah, my master's wife, bore him a son when she was old, and my master has given everything he owns to him. 37 My master made me promise with a vow to obey his command. He said, 'Do not choose a wife for my son from the girls in the land of Canaan. 38 Instead, go to my father's people, to my relatives, and choose a wife for him.'

42 "When I came to the well today, I prayed, 'Lord, God of my master Abraham, please give me success in what I am doing. 43 Here I am at the well. When a young woman comes out to get water, I will ask her to give me a drink of water from her jar. 44 If she agrees and also offers to bring water for my camels, may she be the one that you have chosen as the wife for my master's son.' 45 Before I had finished my silent prayer, Rebecca came with a water jar on her shoulder and went down to the well to get water. I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.'

46 She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So, I drank, and she watered the camels. 47 I asked her, 'Who is your father?' And she answered, 'My father is Bethuel son of Nahor and Milcah.' Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms. 48 I knelt down and worshipped the Lord, the God of my master Abraham who had led me straight to my master's relative, where I found his daughter for my master's son. 49 Now, if you intend to fulfil your responsibility towards my master and treat him fairly, please tell me; if not, say so, and I will decide what to do."

58 So they called Rebecca and asked, "Do you want to go with this man?" "Yes," she answered.

59 So they let Rebecca and her old family servant go with Abraham's servant and his men. 60 They gave Rebecca their blessing in these words: "May you, sister, become the mother of millions! May your descendants conquer the cities of their enemies!" 61 The Rebecca and her young women got ready and mounted the camels to go with Abraham's servant, and they all started out.

62 Isaac had come into the wilderness of "The Well of the Living One Who Sees Me" and was staying in the southern part of Canaan. 63 He went out in the early evening to take a walk in the fields and saw camels coming. 64 When Rebecca saw Isaac, she got down from her camel 65 and asked Abraham's servant. "Who is that man walking toward us in the field?"

"He is my master," the servant answered. So, she took her scarf and covered her face.

66 The servant told Isaac everything he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought Rebecca into the tent that his mother Sarah had lived in, and she became his wife. Isaac loved Rebecca, and so he was comforted for the loss of his mother.

Mathew 11: 16-19, 25-30

11:16 "Now, to what can I compare the people of this day? They are like children sitting in the marketplace. One group shout to the other, 17 'We played wedding music for you, but you wouldn't dance! We sang funeral songs, but you wouldn't cry!' 18 When John came, he fasted and drank no wine, and everyone said, 'He has a demon in him!' When the Son of Man came, he ate and drank, and everyone said, 'Look at this man! He is a glutton and drinker, a friend of tax collectors and other outcasts!' God's wisdom, however, is shown to be true by its results."

25 At that time Jesus said, "Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned. 26 Yes, Father, this was how you wanted it to happen.

27 "My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. 30 For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light."

Message:

The story of Abraham is like a well-directed and well-rehearsed drama where everything seems to fall into their right place at the right time. Everyone is doing what is expected of them and the

drama, of course arrived at a happy ending. Abraham is exulted and considered highly by the audience. Of course, this was how I came to know Abraham in my childhood years. He was a superhero. An obedient, courageous, righteous man and person full of faith that qualifies him for 'the promise' in the eyes of many. He was a man that had it all together. He spoke with God, chosen by God and nothing on earth can trouble him, not even the command to sacrifice his own son could deter him.

The trouble in seeing this great man only in that high pedestal, as James R. Davies pointed out, 'we fail to see their struggles...and it makes our lives seem even harsher.'

Can you imagine the kind of feeling I had when I learned that Abraham was no super man? That Abraham was as human as anyone else on earth? That he struggled with his own faith and with his own obedience?

We know from the bible (Genesis 12: 1-5) that he was called, to leave his country and go to a land that God will show him and that he is to go alone which is mentioned also in Isaiah 51: 2. But he did not go alone. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all their substance that they had gathered plus the souls that they had gotten in Haran.

We know that in Genesis 12: 10-20, it tells of Abram asking Sarai to say to the Egyptians that she was only his sister. And we read in Genesis 20: 1-16, that that was repeated in the Southern region in Gerar when Abraham states to Abimelech (the king) that his wife is really his sister, and both was to save his own life.

We also learn from Genesis 17: 17; 18: 10-12 that both Sarah and Abraham laughed when told by God that they would have a child in their old age.

Yes, I felt disappointed. I felt disappointed because my superhero was just like me – a human being but joyful too. Because now I can claim my own place in the story.

The other point I want to make about the story of Abraham is it is really a story about God. A God who can call anyone, anywhere, anytime to do God's will, to be God's instrument, and recipient of the promise. A God, as we have learnt, is a God who intervenes, who redirects, and restore. And Abraham, with all his struggles and challenges believed in that God. Abraham rested therefore in God's promise.

Abraham was a hard worker, he received both blessings and grief. There were times when he couldn't see his way ahead, but he trusted God and held strong to the promise in his heart.

Today's reading from Genesis 24 is told from the perspective of Abraham's servant. A servant that remain nameless. One commentator points out that it is appropriate for the servant to be nameless because the servant never focuses on his own interests, but instead continually witnesses to God's presence in everything that happens. His task, under oath is to find a wife for Isaac.

The servant is troubled that he may not find a suitable wife for Isaac, so he stopped at a well in the village and prayed. "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show your steadfast love to my master Abraham and the sign would be the young woman who not only gives him a drink but also offers to water his camels will be the one.

Whilst the servant was praying, Rebekah comes out to the well to draw water. The servant asks her for a drink, and she offers to water his camels too. The servant recognises that this was part of God's loyalty to Abraham that he met Rebekah at the well, and he convinced Rebekah's family by telling them of how the Lord led him Isaac's wife.

The unnamed servant has completed a difficult and challenging task by doing what he can and leave the rest for God. Perhaps we can do the same when we are given a difficult and challenging

task. We pray like him, even ask for a sign like Gideon in Judges 6, then watch and discern God's will then we praise God for God's faithfulness and grace.

When Isaac finally appears in the story, he has just returned from visiting the well where God appeared to Hagar as she fled from Sarah's cruelty (Genesis 16: 7-14). That well, was ushering in a new beginning for Isaac. The well that signifies an end to a love story, is now the beginning of another love story. Whilst Isaac was visiting the well in Beer-lahai-roi, Rebekah was watering camels in another well. New beginnings for both and God's loyalty to Abraham and his family has been made known in the union of Isaac and Rebekah.

In the bible, wells symbolise new beginnings. Jacob meets Rachel at a well (Genesis 29: 1-30), Moses meets Zipporah at a well (Exodus 2: 15-22), and we know the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4: 4-26).

I would suggest, that it is a bit like the church. It is a place where strangers meet, hospitality is offered, prayer and testimonies about God's steadfast love, loyalty, and God's faithfulness are shared, the consequences are new hope, renewed trust, even new birth is possible.

In a world that is going through a very tough time and communities are anxious about the future, we must remember God's faithfulness, loyalty and promise. God will intervene for God's righteous purpose. We must do what we can and leave the rest up to God. We can trust God's promise with our whole life for God will always keep God's promise. And we can rest on that promise, like Abraham did. Amen!

Prayer of Intercession:

Gracious and merciful God, you have promised rest to the weary and relief to the heavy laden: hear the prayers we bring for your people.

We pray for those weighed down by the hardships of daily life:  
for those who live in poverty, without adequate food or shelter;  
for those in places of war – civilians, soldiers and refugees.  
Relieve their burdens, that all your people may live in dignity and peace.

We pray for those wearied by responsibility in your church:  
for those without the resources to fulfil their tasks;  
for those whose dreams are shattered, whose vision others do not share.  
Renew their spirits, that they may find strength in you.

We pray for those burdened by guilt, self-doubt, anxiety or despair:  
for those unable to leave behind the past;  
for those afraid of the present and without hope for the future.

We pray for those worn down by pain, grief or by a sense of uselessness;  
for those whom society does not value or want;  
for the lonely, the friendless, the sick and the dying.

Lighten the loads, soothe the hurts and lift our spirits.  
Gracious God, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

(Adaptation from J. Nelson 'Let us Pray', 1999)

Hymn: 585 (TiS) 'I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest;'

Blessing: May the peace of the Lord be with you were ever you are, today and always. **Amen.**