Call to Worship

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Prayers of Approach

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of Confession

Our hearts are open to you, loving God. You know the times we have reached out to you in prayer. And you know the times we've turned away, too busy to seek your guidance, or all too well aware of what your response would be. So now we bring to you the week that is past, the times we have lived in love and the times we have not, and we give it all to you,
asking for your forgiveness when we have hurt others,
asking for the strength to forgive others when they have hurt us.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Listen: here is good news. Christ Jesus came into the world
to forgive us in our failure, to accept us as we are,
to set us free from evil’s power and make us what we were meant to be.
Through him God says to each of us:
You are accepted. You are forgiven. I will set you free.
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Adapted from Green, B. (ed.) (1991)
Baptist Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship

All Age Activity

Ask people to remember when they were chosen to do something, or when they were rejected. How did it feel?

Prayer of Inspiration

Guide us, O God,
by your Word and Spirit,
that in your light we may see light,
in your truth find wisdom,
and in your will discover peace,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Taken from Andy Braunston, previous DD service]

Readings

Genesis 12:1-9 | Romans 4:13-25 | St Matthew 9:9-17

Sermon Notes

Genesis 12:1-9

The focus in this passage on Abram and Sarai marks a change in the Hebrew Bible from mythic stories - Creation, the Fall, the Flood and the Tower of Babel - which consider why the world is as it is, to homing in on the story of one particular couple.

God promises to bless not only Abram and his family but through him all the families of the earth. There seems to be no particular reason why Abram is singled out for this
honour other than God's gracious choice; immediately after this passage is recorded his first attempt of several to bend the truth for his own safety! But it is the first of three times, in Genesis 12, 15 and 17, when God's call to Abram, and the covenant agreement God makes with him, are described.

As we will see in the next passage this widening out of divine blessing from one couple to every nation is good news for people who are not descendants of Abram by blood. However, in the text's admission that, when Abram entered Canaan, 'at that time the Canaanites were in the land', we also see the very beginning of that conflict over God's promise of land that has wracked the Middle East from then to now.

*Romans 4:13-25*

In this passage Paul is right in the middle of his struggle, taking up most of this letter, with the theological difficulty of how Gentiles (who, as non-Jews, cannot obey all God's laws as given to Moses), can be included in God's covenant agreement with the people of Israel.

Living centuries before Moses, of course, Abraham could not have lived by those laws either. Yet in Genesis 15:6 we hear that '[Abraham] believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

In v17 Paul takes the description of Abraham as 'father of many nations' (his new name from God in Genesis 17:5) and uses it to allow all Christians a place within Abraham's family. Though Abraham did not become righteous through keeping God's laws, his belief/faith/trust that God's promises of offspring would come true were sufficient for that purpose. As Gentile Christians, our equivalent is our belief/faith/trust in God's having raised Jesus from death.

What does the word 'faith' mean to us now? Do we use it to mean the content of our faith, or the reliability of God's care for us?

*St Matthew 9:9-17*

This passage is sandwiched between two stories of healing: a paralysed man, whose sins Jesus forgives, and a woman in the crowd whose continual menstrual bleeding has rendered her unclean and untouchable in society for over a decade.

The first section (9-13) describes the calling of Matthew the tax collector - a collaborator with the Roman occupation - and Jesus' penchant for contact with social outcasts, arguing that a doctor is needed by those who are sick rather than the well. His justification is a quotation of God's words from Hosea 6: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'; the quotation continues: 'and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings'. Who, in the surrounding passages and this one, is a sinner, and who sinned against? Which laws, in
Jesus' mind, take priority over others? Who is God calling here and now, and how do we fit in: as fellow workers, or as Pharisees, standing back and pointing fingers?

The second section (14-17) speaks of tensions between three groups who all claim to be doing God's will: the disciples of John the Baptist, those of the Pharisees and those of Jesus himself. While the first two are dutifully following the law of Moses - the Pharisees are famed for their rigour in so doing - Jesus' disciples seem to be ignoring it.

Again, the question of priorities emerges. Who is following the letter of God's law, and who the spirit? What is the right thing for those who love God to be doing here and now? Will the answer always be the same? By Jesus' argument, new movements can pose a threat to old institutions. Yet those who drink wine may argue with justification that vintage is also significant...

**Affirmation of Faith**

*We believe in an innovative God,*  
*who does not wait for us to find ourselves*  
*but comes seeking the lost*  
*and calling us into a new way.*

*We believe in Jesus of Nazareth as God’s crucial initiative,*  
*that when he calls us to follow, Christ also gives us the power*  
*to become, both in creed and deed, the children of the living God.*  
*We believe in the Spirit by whom Jesus still comes to us,*  
*calling us to follow him into an obedience which is true liberty*  
*and to a humble service which is the fruit of holy friendship.*

*We believe in the Church*  
*as the fellowship of Christ’s people,*  
*called to respect and support one another*  
*through joys and tribulations*  
*as we travel the road towards the “promised land”*  
*of God’s future.*

*Adapted from Bruce Prewer,*  
*http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocB/BEPIPHANY3.htm*

**Offertory Prayer**

*God loves a generous giver.*  
*So let us pray for a spirit of generosity*  
*as we offer back to God our money, our time, and ourselves.*

*Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory,*
the splendour and the majesty,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours.
All things come from you, and of your own do we give you. Amen.

*From Common Worship*

**Thanksgiving and Concern**

As we come to our prayers of thanksgiving and concern, I invite you to pause as you pray. How has God called you in the past? Give thanks to God for that call and that care.

How is God calling you now? Ask for the Spirit's encouragement and comfort.

I invite you to bring to mind the variety of people who hear Jesus' call to follow: older and younger, people who think differently, act differently, love differently from us, as well as those of our own family and tribe. Let's give thanks for everyone God has made, asking that we may recognise and encourage each other's calling.

Consider those you know and those you will never meet, people in our families, in our streets, in our world, in need of healing, in need of justice, in need of peace. May God call people to give help in times of need; may we hear when God is calling us to be the answer to our prayers.

In a moment of silence, I invite you to share with God the concerns of your heart. All our prayers, all our fears, all our hopes, we give to the God who has called us, and who will always be faithful. Amen.

**Holy Communion**

Jesus often shared food and drink with those he loved. Outcasts and ne'er-do-wells, fishermen and tax-collectors, deniers and traitors, his friends and his family. Today, Jesus wants to share bread and wine with you. So I invite you now to prepare yourself to eat and drink with each other and with him.
Lift up your hearts
We lift them up to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
It is right to give our thanks and praise

Generous host,
you made the whole world for us to enjoy and to share.
You came in Jesus to teach us how to be your guests.
Your Spirit joins us together in the joy of hospitality.
So we praise you, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,**
**Heaven and earth are full of your glory.**
**Hosanna in the highest.**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
**Hosanna in the highest.**

Come to us where we are, God our Host,
worshipping, may we meet around your table
as we remember Jesus, who, on the night before he died,
took bread and wine, blessed them
and gave them to his invited guests,
saying: 'This is my body; this is my blood.
Eat and drink to remember me.'
And I invite you to join with me in saying:

**Pour out your Holy Spirit,**
**on this bread and this wine; and on these your people.**
**May we worship you with body, heart and spirit**
**online and face to face,**
**now and in the whole of our lives. Amen.**

Let us proclaim together the mystery of faith.

**Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

As Jesus taught his friends, let us pray together: **Our Father...**

Among friends, gathered around a table, Jesus took bread and broke it and said,
‘This is my body, broken for you.’

Later he took a cup of wine and said,
‘This is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death.'
Take it, all of you, to remember me.’
So eat this bread. It is the bread of life
And drink this wine. It is the cup of blessing.

Prayer after Communion

Loving God, you have fed us generously at this table,
as we have remembered Jesus and rejoiced that he is with us today.
We hear your call to follow him, and to be your people in the world.
May your Holy Spirit show us the way, make us holy and fill us with love.

Blessing

May God who is light shine in our darkness.
May God who is love be the love between us.
May God who is life be our life, everlasting.
And the blessing of God, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit
is with us and all people, now and always. Amen.

From Rev Elizabeth Gray-King

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hymn Suggestions</th>
<th>RS</th>
<th>CH4</th>
<th>StF</th>
<th>MP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus calls us here to meet him</td>
<td></td>
<td>510</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus calls us o'er the tumult</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Abraham and Sarah</td>
<td>553</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I to the hills will lift mine eyes</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazing grace</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will you come and follow me</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>673</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One more step along the world I go</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>1346</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RS – Rejoice & Sing | CH4 – Church Hymnary 4 | StF – Singing the Faith | MP – Mission Praise

* 632 is a modern version of the Psalm

You may also like: They Were Really Nothing Special (Songs to shake us up - John Campbell)