



LENT 2A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

476 STF – One more step along the world I go

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

247 STF – I danced in the morning OR

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Readings: Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

Hymn:

103 STF – God is love: let heaven adore him OR

370 STF – Breathe on me, Breath of God

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

469 STF – I watch the sunrise OR

82 STF – O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

94 STF – To God be the glory, great things he has done! OR

345 STF – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood

Blessing

Call to worship

Throughout the ages, people have gathered to worship.
Across the centuries, we have turned our praise to God on high.
Today, let us join in this ancient tradition,
And mark this Lord's day, in this place, together.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR
476 STF – One more step along the world I go

Opening Prayers

Loving Lord,
As we turn our eyes towards you this morning, may we remember that in you we are loved and that this love endures all.

God of all things, as we turn our hearts towards those around us this day, may we remember that all others on this Earth too are loved and worthy in your eyes and that this worthiness endures all.

God of the psalms, as we lift our faces towards the mountains, may we remember that we were created as one with the natural world and help us to hum your presence in tune with all creation.

Loving God, help us to turn to you this day and every day,

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hands up anyone who knows what we mean when we say Maxim?

[See around the room]

The official definition of a Maxim is:

- A general truth, fundamental principle, or a rule of conduct.
- A proverbial saying.

Now, I don't know about you but that doesn't really make much sense to me. It's just a somewhat confusing definition! Now, what if I gave an example of what a Maxim is? Would that help you all to know what I mean?

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

“People in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones”

“Honesty is the best policy”

“Actions speak louder than words”

You’ve likely heard things like these all the time! Can you name any more?

[Ask the room. After a couple of suggestions, regroup]

We hear them everyday and we know what they mean when someone says it. For example:

If I said “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” it would mean (*wait for a response or a volunteer to respond. If no one does, give answer*) “Eat healthily.”

If I said “Haste makes waste” it would mean (*wait for a response or a volunteer to respond. If no one does, give answer*) “Rushing leads to mistakes.”

Within each Maxim there is a lesson that we can learn and take to heart; but doesn’t require you to have read many books, been to school, have specific learning or knowledge. You can find more within the bible by another name: Proverbs, and we have a whole book on those!

But Jesus also found ways of teaching that didn’t require having a lot of specific knowledge. He told stories or parables. And Jesus even explained why he did this!

[Read Matthew 13: 10 – 13 in a version that you are comfortable with. Below is the Message version]

The disciples came up and asked, “Why do you tell stories?”

He replied, “You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn’t been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That’s why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward a welcome awakening. In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they’re blue in the face and not get it. I don’t want Isaiah’s forecast repeated all over again.

To Jesus, there shouldn’t be any barrier in knowing about God. And Jesus knew that it would take people time to understand, so he told them parables that would prepare the way for them to encounter and learn about God. To Jesus, you didn’t need to know about history or be gifted academically to know about God: God is for all.

Let us pray.

Dear God,

May we be open to learning more about you, and help others to hear and know you.

Amen.³

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Hymn:

247 STF – I danced in the morning OR
254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Readings: Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

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Reflections on the readings

Are there any legends or stories that have been passed down in your family? Tales of heroism, fortune (or misfortune!) or blessing in the lives of your ancestors, that get talked about at family gatherings? Take a few minutes now to turn to your neighbour and share anything that comes to mind.

In today's Old Testament readings, we get to hear a story that becomes the stuff of legend for the Christian church as it grows. Then, later on in our reading from Paul's letter to the early church in Rome, we hear this story being used to inspire, teach and motivate a community much further down the generations. We're going to look at these two moments together today, and explore what they have to tell us about our place in a family of faith that has stories to turn to, which can inspire our faith today.

In our Old Testament reading, we meet Abraham, just as he is hearing a big calling from God. This story comes after the first 11 chapters of Genesis show how people were constantly turning away from God, and seeking to build up their own power, wealth and security. Even though God has kept trying to reach them, people kept turning away. Now, God is taking a different approach. God offers Abraham a wealth of blessings, if he will embrace his faith in God and step out in trust to follow. The blessings that God promises to Abraham probably sounded crazy to Abraham's ears. When God tells Abraham that he will make him into a great nation, this suggests that Abraham's children will be part of forging a new lineage. But when Abraham hears this he is already old, and he and his wife Sarah have struggled to have children for a very long time. What God is offering is nothing short of a miracle! God isn't offering Abraham a roadmap for how this will happen, but is asking him to respond to this great invitation with a faithful "yes".

The simple sentence "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him," feels like it skips a lot of detail. Surely, Abraham deliberated in that moment, overwhelmed by the clarity of hearing God's voice, struggling to believe that these miraculous promises could come true. However, it's important to remember that we're not reading this story in real time. The book of Genesis was written down long after this moment took place, by people who know what happens next. By the time pen has been put to papyrus, this story has already been passed down between the generations, told in awe and wonder about what happens next. So, instead of capturing the doubt and challenge that Abraham felt in this moment, this story is written down in history to remind people of God's faithfulness. Even in its earliest days, Abraham's story is reminding people that they too can step out in faith to follow God's calling, because they have seen God deliver on God's promises in the past.

In our passage in Romans, we skip forward in time to more than a century later. We see another community of people drawing on this story, to remind themselves that whatever God will do next, will be good. When Paul tells this story again to the people of the early Church in Rome, he puts particular emphasis on the way Abraham is called by God. Paul reminds his listeners that when God called Abraham, he didn't do so because Abraham had behaved exceptionally, worked hard and done everything right. Instead, God's calling begins with a promise to Abraham, made through God's grace without any conditions. God's blessing, so freely promised in grace to Abraham, invites only one thing in response: faith. Paul reminds the Church in Rome that there is one thing that is secured in God: that God's promise of relationship with God's people rests on grace alone. Faith is the response we are invited to make to this unimaginable gift.

There's more good news. God doesn't just expect us to blindly trust that these unimaginable promises will come true. Instead, we get to be part of a long tradition of people who have inherited stories of the way God has delivered on God's promise. Just as the people of the early Church in Rome are reminded of God's grace by Paul through Abraham's story, and just as the authors of Genesis wrote down Abraham's story to remind them of God's faithfulness, we are given the gift of family legends, stories from our shared past as people made in the image of God. We can look to these and be reminded of God's commitment to us, given freely in grace, that God will always turn up and deliver on God's promises.

There's also a great reminder in both of these stories that being part of this family of faith doesn't depend on your heritage, or your connections, or what you've done. God promises Abraham that through his blessing "all people's on earth will be blessed." Paul says to the Romans that it's not only the descendants of Abraham to whom God's promise extends – meaning it's not only people of Jewish heritage. This is a promise that rests on grace and is "guaranteed to all his descendants." Through God's grace all people are called into the family of faith that can trust and receive in God's promise.

We gather here today, as people who are included in this invitation. Just as God invited Abraham to turn away from his own priorities – the things that gave him safety and security – and to turn instead towards God in faith, we too are invited to turn towards God in our lives. As we hear these stories afresh today, we are reminded that the faith God's invites us to have is not a tick-list of things we can do to earn God's blessing. Nor does it mean an easy trust in a step-by-step guide of where God will take us next. Faith is a response to a promise that comes first from God, an offer of unimaginable blessing given to us freely in God's grace. Our faith is invited in the response of a simple, "Yes!"

Questions for discussion

- What does this kind of faith mean for you today?
- What is God inviting you to say "Yes!" to in your life?
- How can you spend time listening to the stories of our family of faith, in the bible and in your community, that help us to understand God better?

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

469 STF – I watch the sunrise OR

82 STF – O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder

⁴ Reflection written by Hannah Fremont-Brown

Prayers of intercession

Generous and gracious God,

We thank you for your promise to us, that you will fill us with good things, and give us hope and a future.

Thank you for bringing us into a family of faith, where your faithfulness throughout the generations speaks of your goodness to us, yesterday, today and forever.

God, strengthen our faith that we might trust in you, speaking a confident “yes!” to your calling on our lives.

We pray for ourselves.

God, you see my heart and know all the things that fill it – good and anxious, confident and fearful. I take a moment now to open my heart before you, holding in your safe hands the things that occupy my thoughts at the moment.

God, I pray that you would meet me in any fear I hold, helping me to trust that just as you have turned up in goodness before, to Abraham, to Paul and to the early church, you will turn up with goodness in my life.

God, I pray that I might be confident to share my own stories of faith, that in my life I will point towards the blessings you have freely offered me and speak to others of how good you are.

We pray for our church.

God, we pray for our church community gathered here in this place today. Thank you that we are part of your family of faith, and that through the relationships we have, we can be encouraged to deepen our faith in you.

God, help us to create opportunities that together we might share our own stories of faith, that they might become encouragements to one another. Strengthen our confidence to share our testimony of faith with one another, and with the people around us. Grow our story, that we can be part of the heritage that shows your goodness through the generations.

We pray for our world.

God, we know that so many people struggle to trust that things can get better. When life is challenging, and the news brings so many stories of hopelessness, help us to work together to write a different story. In this season of Lent, help us to be people who can help bring the light of your resurrection to break into the darkness. When we encounter despair, help us to be people of hope.

God, we have been reminded of your goodness through the generations. We praise and thank you for who you are, who you have been and who you will continue to be: our gracious and generous God.

In Jesus name we pray

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Hannah Fremont-Brown

Holy, holy Lord,
We have received so much from you, and today we turn to you in gratitude.
Thank you, for the gifts I have received, for the gifts each of us have received,
And may these gifts here be used to help make a difference in the community around us,
and the wider world,
By your grace, O Lord,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

94 STF – To God be the glory, great things he has done! OR
345 STF – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood

Blessing

Go from this place, with the glory of the Lord shining all around.
Go from this place, with the Spirit of the Lord travelling ahead of you.
Go from this place, following in the light of the Christ,
In Jesus' name, go and serve the Lord.

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker