



Jacob left Beersheba... and came to a certain place and stayed there that night.... He dreamed and behold there was a ladder, set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac....Behold, I am with you.... Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it" And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven".

Genesis 28:10-17

In the mists of life's complexities, in the centre of its ambiguities and cloudiness the plantings of truth break through. They rise free and come to fruitfulness. They spread slender leaves of certainty; they flower in vivid faith and turn their faces daily to God.

This, too, is our calling, this is our destiny in the power of the Spirit.

We look to know you now, Jesus the Christ.

Come, Lord, come to us now as we seek once more to enter a sacred time of worship as myriad forbears of the faithful have done from the beginnings of human searching for meaning.

Hymn 87

*You are before me, Lord, you are behind,
and over me you have spread out your hand;
such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too high to grasp, too great to understand.*

*Then where, Lord, from your presence shall I go,
and from your Spirit, where, Lord shall I fly?
If I ascend to heaven you are there,
and still are with me if in hell I lie;*

*and if I take my flight into the dawn,
or if I dwell on ocean's farthest shore,
your mighty hand shall rest upon me still,
and your right hand will guard me evermore.*

*Search me, O God, search me and know my ways;
try me, O God, my mind and spirit try;
keep me from any path that gives you pain
and lead me in the everlasting way.*

Confession and Assurance

You have "searched us and known us", O God . When we try to lose you in the busyness of our day, in the demands of our human agendas:

You are there.

Even before we open our mouths to speak or formulate our words in prayer:

You are there.

In those times when we would turn away from you and deny your presence and purpose for us

You are there.

You know our deepest thoughts and feelings, our best inclinations and darkest passions and intentions, for even then

You are there.

We struggle with the concepts of your otherness as heavenly One, O God, yet also eternal presence with us.

We rejoice that in a world shifting and changing, you are the rock, the one enduring reality unfettered by time and space.

So we would trust you to lead us to truth when we stray from the right path. You give us the will to follow the compassionate Christian way again; for we are your faithful people.

Yes, in following the pattern and example of Jesus the Christ, sin is at an end. God's peace is our peace!

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Hymn 48

*You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord,
who abide in this shadow for life,
say to the Lord: 'My refuge,
my rock in whom I trust!'*

*'And I will raise you up on eagle's wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of my hand'.*

*Snares of the fowler will never capture you,
and famine will bring you no fear
under God's wings your refuge
with faithfulness your shield.*

*'And I will raise you up on eagle's wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of my hand'.*

*For to the angels God's given a command,
to guard you in all of your ways;
upon their hands they will bear you up,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

*'And I will raise you up on eagle's wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of my hand'.*

Psalm 139:1-18 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.
Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.
For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there were none of them.
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake, and I am still with you.

In this is the word of the Lord for us.

Romans 8:12-25

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death

the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are daughters and sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as daughters and sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the daughters and sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as daughters and sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what they see? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

In this is the word of the Lord for us.

Gospel Matthew 13:24-30

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.' "

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

Hymn 598

*Dear Father, Lord of humankind,
forgive our foolish ways,
re clothe us in our rightful mind:
in purer lives our service find,
in deeper reverence, praise,
In deeper reverence, praise.*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard,
beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee,
rise up and follow thee.*

*O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love,
interpreted by love!*

Reflection

I remember how, as we grew up in the church youth group, we often sang a song “We are climbing Jacob’s ladder”. It was used with us as a “modern” hymn. Funny thing that! Because it harks back to one of the foundation stories of the Hebrew people, back to the second millennium B.C. in fact. It is part of a rather complex selection of Lectionary readings for today and so I used it to open our worship today because it reminds us that the eternal questions for people of faith were part and parcel of the earliest questionings of humankind. A ladder between heaven and earth was, clearly, pointing to both the question of the relation between earth and heaven and its early resolution in faith. “God’s in his heaven and all’s well with the world” - but only if and when we human beings recognise that God is just as much a part of both realms, not displaced far away. And as for humanity, humankind belongs in both, also. Not in the sense that earthy existence is a preparation for heavenly bliss but because both are embraced as God’s reality and, therefore, our being is at one with both. So the earthly actions that do not belong in God’s heavenly realm do not, in the final “wash up”, have a place in God’s heavenly realm. Sometimes we faithful people turn our efforts to “weeding”, to simply trying to get rid of people and things that seem to be the opponents of the reign of God, the “heavenly realm”. We pour the “weed-killer” of our condemnation on the heads of those people and things that we disapprove of and enjoy sitting back with an air of piety and self-righteousness. But in the parable of the weeds Jesus encourages us instead to simply focus on growing and blossoming as the true people of God – as those who rise among the weeds of life in beauty and in goodness, in love and compassion and justice, as those who are already experiencing and sharing the eternal life that is to be found when we know as our reality, and live it, as the full expression of God’s purpose and gift to all.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the daughters and sons of God... that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Paul’s perspective of long ago has a depth of meaning to a confused world turned upside down by a pandemic beyond its imaginings. And so we turn to our prayers for ourselves and others and for a world unrecognisable to us and all our previous perceptions and expectations - **but still God’s world.**

Prayers and Lord's Prayer

We pray, O God, for all who this day feel surrounded by choking barriers that inhibit life in ways outside our previous experiences and expectations. We know that for so many it seems as though they must force their way through endless forests to find signs of hope and of meaning for the future. We, too, struggle to find signs that your life is present in our world.

Come, great Creator, come. Be with us all, loving Lord Jesus the risen One and stay Holy Spirit, our inspiration and eternal companion.

Raise up among us life nourished by your eternal truth. Give us strength that courage may spring forth to sustain in us the growth of justice and compassion for we would be those whose lives reveal your love and the certainty for faith in the future in which heavenly reality and earthly existence are nevertheless one.

Come, great Creator, come. Be with us all, loving Lord Jesus the risen One and stay Holy Spirit, our inspiration and eternal companion. Live in us, grow in us and ever be the ground of our being.

***Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.***

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Benediction

May God the Creator begin new life in us,
Christ Jesus nurture all that brings us into wholeness
and the Holy Spirit surround us with space for our growing into God's eternity.
Amen.

Reverend Graeme Kerr

An Overview of our Worship in Isolation

I would like to say how much I have enjoyed the privilege of preparing weekly worship on-line and thus sharing with you the paradox of fellowship in isolation. It occurs to me that this has really been a time of identifying with the early Christian experience when the formal structures of the church and its fellowship were yet to develop. As we know from the Book of Acts and the New Testament Letters the Christian fellowship groups were dependent on written communication from often far removed leaders to address the issues of faith and practice.

So what we have been experiencing with our on-line interaction has been a re-visiting of the beginnings of Christianity! An awesome thought! and, surely, an uplifting recognition in an otherwise challenging time. It gives a very first-hand understanding to that wonderful passage in the Letter to the Hebrews

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
For by it the people of old received their commendation.

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ...

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who ...is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8, 10,32-34; 12:1-2

Yes, we are, in our unique experience of late, indelibly written into “the great cloud of witnesses”.

There have indeed been fears and frustrations. But being people of faith, we have endured. Now we are challenged to move on and build anew on the heritage within which we are privileged to stand as the people of God.

"You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same and your years will have no end."

Hebrews 1: 10-12

Reverend Graeme Kerr

19 July 2020

A Special Celebration for Rowan Ebbels

On Monday Rowan will reach the landmark 90th Birthday

THIS SUNDAY WE WOULD HAVE ENJOYED A SPECIAL MORNING TEA. ROWAN has been a faithful stalwart of St Andrews for much of his 90 years. We honour his Christian discipleship and his many contributions to the life and worship of St Andrews Congregation. We thank him and look forward to sharing a post-isolation celebration.