

**Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist  
Circuit**

**Worship at Home – 5 March 2023**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever you are sharing in this act of worship, you are welcome.

A prayer to prepare ourselves for worship:

Creator,  
You made the rolling hills and painted the endless sky  
You hold in Your hands the depths of the ocean and the expanse of the universe. Yet, You still have time for each of us.  
You tend to the needs of Your children,  
You listen to our whispers and to our cries,  
You know our voices, and we thank You that we can know Yours too.

God with us,  
We thank You that as with Abram whom you called to go,  
You know our every move.  
In every place and space we have the opportunity to encounter You,  
to be transformed by Your presence and healed by Your love.  
We are thankful for country, kindred and home,  
and for the promise of future hope.

Jesus, Word of Life,  
As with Nicodemus, You long to teach us Your ways.  
For Your presence with us as we learn,  
We thank You that even when we falter, You gently guide us,  
When we do not understand or rush to the wrong conclusion,  
You are patient and wait with us.

God,  
You hold open Your hands of blessing for all.  
As we offer our prayers and our worship in adoration and thankfulness,  
we know that in Your mercy You hear us and in Your grace You guide us and love us.  
Amen.

**Hymn: Singing the Faith 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 forever wilt be.

Refrain:  
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!

2 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.  
[Refrain]

3 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!  
[Refrain]

**Prayer:** Loving God, You know each of us from before we were born.  
You journey with us through thick and thin. In the light, when we can see clearly and the dark, when it can be difficult and confusing.

We confess that we do not always live up to Your expectations of us.  
We often misunderstand, or do not listen.  
We can be too hasty to judge or to write someone off.  
When we are not awake to Your signs and Your presence,  
please forgive us.  
When we take a wrong turn or walk away from the opportunity to bless, or be a blessing  
please forgive us.

Loving God, You know us and love us all.  
In this moment of stillness, we bring to mind

the times we have fallen short and seek your forgiveness.

In Your mercy  
hear our prayers.  
Amen

### **Reading: Genesis 12: 1 – 4a**

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.

### **Reading: John 3: 1 – 17**

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have

told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

### **Reflection:**

About 4,000 years ago a family of semitic nomads left Ur of the Chaldeans, perhaps in southeastern Iraq near Nasariyah, and settled in Haran, Turkey, on the Syrian border. There in Haran the father Terah died, and the son Abraham received a divine command to continue his journey: "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" Believing that he had heard the very voice of God, at the age of seventy-five "Abram left, as the Lord had told him" and journeyed toward the land of Canaan.

Abram left Haran in faith, not knowing where he was going, or even why except that God had commanded him. He acted wholeheartedly without absolute certainty.<sup>1</sup> In so doing he defied both the inner propensities of human nature and the outer pressures of cultural conformity to cling to the familiar, the self-serving, and the broad and easy road. Abraham journeyed from what he knew to what he did not know, from what he had to what he did not have, from the comfortable to the strange and the unpredictable. He journeyed "like a stranger in a foreign country"

God's command to Abram to leave his country included a promised blessing. In some strange way his outer, geographic journey from Haran to Canaan would elicit God's divine favour:

I will make you into a great nation  
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.  
I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
And all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:2-3)

Jews, of course, identify Abraham as their founding father, Christians trace the lineage of Jesus Christ back to him (Matthew 1:1), and Muslims revere him as a friend of God, a father of the prophets, and an ancestor of Mohammed (Koran 37:109).

God called Abram to leave his geographic place and, with it, everything that was familiar: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" So Abram gathered his family and possessions, left Haran, and "set out for the land of Canaan."

This story is about more than a change of geography. In leaving Haran for Canaan, he left all that was familiar—all custom and comfort, family and friends, all regularity and rhythm of his life. The only thing he would retain of Haran was the power of memory. This was a journey from former clarity into a future of genuine and profound ignorance. Abram journeyed from what he had to what he did not have, from the known to the unknown, from everything that was familiar to all things strange. Thus the New Testament commentary on his subversive obedience to God: "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country"

God does not inform him of his destination in advance, but asks him for trust and a willingness to head toward the unknown. It is hard to imagine a more radical command: Give up everything and go toward the place that God will show you--again, both a metaphor and a concrete reality. The religious, covenantal life offers no guarantee of security, no promise of ease or convenience. Instead, it asks us to shatter the idols of security and settledness, and to aspire to a different kind of reality. The covenant is born in the moment when God

calls for the courage to abandon complacency.

The Hebrew words in the passage "go forth suggest something like, "Go for yourself," or even "Go to yourself."

Abram's journey is for his own good, and his own benefit. He is told not merely that he has to give up everything and look for something better, richer, and more in tune with God's values, but that he must understand that the journey is for his own good.

Clearly, to step out on the journey, we need to have an attitude of obedience. Verse 1, God says, "Leave your country..." "So Abram left..."

Today like Abram, we commit ourselves to the journey of faithfulness wherever it may take us.

### **Hymn: Singing the Faith 673**

Will you come and follow me  
if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know  
and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown,  
will you let my name be known,  
will you let my life be grown  
in you and you in me?

Will you leave your self behind  
if I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind  
and never be the same?  
Will you risk the hostile stare  
should your life attract or scare,  
will you let me answer prayer  
in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see  
if I but call your name?  
Will you set the prisoners free  
and never be the same?  
Will you kiss the leper clean  
and do such as this unseen,  
and admit to what I mean  
in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide  
if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside  
and never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found  
to reshape the world around  
through my sight and touch and sound  
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true  
when you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you  
and never be the same.  
In your company I'll go  
where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow  
in you and you in me.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

God of all,  
You have called us to follow You.  
You have called us to care for Your world and  
for Your children,  
You have called us to be a blessing, not a  
curse.

We think of our community  
and all the different activities that take place  
in and around it,  
all the people who have grown up here, or  
moved here in recent times.  
We remember all those who live and work  
here,  
who learn and play here,  
who love and care here,  
we bring them all before You now.

Lord in Your mercy  
**Hear our prayers**

We think of our country  
and all of the different decisions being made  
in parliaments and councils.  
We think of communities facing many  
different challenges.  
God, we pray for healing, for fulness of life  
and for Your way of love to be the guiding  
rule.

Lord in Your mercy  
**Hear our prayers**

As we think of the world that You so loved so  
much that You gave Your only Son, as we  
continue to come and go,  
we pray for Your guidance – help us to be  
aware of the impact we are having on the  
planet and on others.

Lord in Your mercy  
**Hear our prayers**

Merciful God,  
help us to care for and to love all of Your  
children.  
Inspire us to speak out truth to power and  
healing to division.  
And may we be a blessing to all whom we  
encounter  
and humbly receive the blessing from those  
who encounter us.  
**Amen**

Hymn: Singing the Faith 91  
The God of Abraham praise  
who reigns enthroned above;  
the Ancient of eternal days  
and God of love!  
The Lord, the great I AM,  
by earth and heaven confessed,  
we bow before his holy name  
for ever blessed.

To him we lift our voice  
at whose supreme command  
from earth we rise to seek the joys  
at his right hand:  
we all on earth forsake,  
its wisdom, fame and power;  
the God of Israel we shall make  
our shield and tower.

Though nature's strength decay,  
and earth and hell withstand,  
at his command we fight our way  
to Canaan's land:  
the watery deep we pass  
with Jesus in our view,  
and through the howling wilderness  
our path pursue

He by himself has sworn —  
we on his oath depend —  
we shall, on eagles' wings upborne,  
to heaven ascend;  
there we shall see his face,  
his power we shall adore,  
and sing the wonders of his grace  
for evermore.

There dwells the Lord our King,  
the Lord our righteousness,  
victorious over death and sin,  
the Prince of peace: on Zion's sacred height

his kingdom he maintains, and glorious with  
his saints in light  
for ever reigns.

Triumphant hosts on high  
give thanks eternally  
and 'Holy, holy, holy,' cry,  
'great Trinity!'

Hail, Abraham's God and ours!  
One mighty hymn we raise,  
all power and majesty be yours  
and endless praise.

The blessing of God, the Father, the Son and  
the Holy Spirit, be upon us and remain us for  
ever. Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. In the  
name of Christ. Amen.