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Sunday 1 March 2026 – Lent 2

Our Service today is led by Kimberley Nielsen,
one of our Lay Preachers.

Welcome to our service this morning.

In working together on our shared mission, we commit to seven core values:

Together, Humility, Curiosity, Love, Inclusiveness, Justice, Sustainability.

Humility: we recognise we do not have all the answers but are prayerfully journeying together as we try to seek them.

Mission Statement: Sharing God's love, creating hope, working for justice.

Community time during the service is a good opportunity to ask for prayers for yourself or others.

After the service you are invited to share in morning tea either in the kitchen or on the deck.

If you, or someone you know, would appreciate a visit from one of our **Pastoral Partners Team**, please speak to the service leader.

*You are invited to stand if you are able,
for the hymns and the offering prayer.*

*You are invited to share in reading aloud the responses in **Bold Type**.*

Welcome

Kia ora and welcome to church this morning on this, the second Sunday of Lent. Our service this morning is structured around 2 scriptures – Psalm 121, and the calling of Abram in Genesis 12.

This Lenten season invites us to bring our whole selves—our loss, our longing, our fragile faith—into God’s presence, where grief and hope are held together.

Sometimes faith begins with a call that interrupts comfort. The psalmist looks to the hills, unsure of what lies ahead, yet confident that help will come. Abram and Sarai are drawn into a journey that leaves behind an old life and looks forward to a future not yet seen.

The season of Lent helps us let go of old commitments and burdens and sets us free to journey into new territories, new promises, new hopes, and new lives. This week, we walk together in that tension, trusting what we cannot yet see, believing that grace accompanies us step by step.

Candle Liturgy

On Sunday morning, for a brief space of time, we leave behind the world of home and work and school—the world where we have our lists of things to do, activities to participate in, tasks to complete. We come here this morning seeking something else. We come here seeking a shift—from the ordinary to the sacred, from doing to being. I invite you to close your eyes. Let go of your list. Recall that it is the season of Lent. Remember the parable of the sower. The sower throws the seed . . . and where it lands determines if it will grow or not grow. Think of it this way: think of the season of Lent as the sower, the time when seeds of faith are thrown with special intensity, as a time a time when God calls to us in a low, urgent voice. Listen. Jesus is being drawn to Jerusalem. Where is God calling you to? What is God calling you to do?

(Silent time)

As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the darkness and pain of injury done to the Earth and its ecosystems.

(A candle is extinguished.)

Let us pray:

Loving God, as we journey through this holy season of Lent, may we be open to your presence. Give us the strength to make the changes that are needed in our lives and the courage to take on the work of transforming the world. Amen.

Call to Worship

Come, wanderers and seekers.

We come, ready to listen for God's call.

Come, those carrying grief or uncertainty.

We come, trusting love will guide the way.

Come, pilgrims of promise.

We come, lifting our eyes to the hills,

for our help comes from the Maker of heaven and earth

Source: Liturgy, Learning, & (Purposeful) Life

Opening Prayer

God of the long road,
you call us to walk by faith, not by sight.

You beckon us from the familiar
toward a future known only to you.

In our weariness, lift us.

In our fear, steady us.

In our grief, remind us that every step is held in grace.

As Abram heard your promise under foreign stars,
as Nicodemus heard your truth in the quiet of night,

so may we hear your voice today,
calling us into life that cannot be contained or controlled,
only trusted, only lived.

Amen

Hymn – [Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer](#) (HFTC 528)

1. Guide me, O my great Redeemer
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty
hold me with your powerful hand:
 Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
 feed me now and evermore!

2. Open now the crystal fountain
where the healing waters flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
 Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer
 ever be my strength and shield!

3. When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
 songs of praises, songs of praises,
 I will ever sing to you.

Prayer of Confession

God of promise and patience,
we confess that we cling to certainty more than to you.
We resist the unknown,
we shrink from risk,
we forget your faithfulness behind and before us.
Forgive us for mistaking comfort for peace
and hesitation for wisdom.
Forgive the smallness of our hope.

Silent reflection

Words of Grace

Hear this truth:
the One who calls you also keeps you.
Even when faith falters, grace remains.
God's love goes before you, behind you, beside you, always.
In Christ, you are forgiven and free to journey on.
Thanks be to God. Amen

Hymn – Psalm 121

(<https://psalms.seedbed.com/psalm-121/> Tune: [St Anne](#))

1. I lift my eyes up to the hills—
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord, who made
the heav'ns and earth—it comes!
2. He won't allow your foot to slip;
His watch o'er you He keeps.
For He who watches Israel—
He slumbers not nor sleeps.
3. The Lord's your keeper; He keeps watch—
He's shade at your right hand.
The sun won't harm you in the day,
Nor moon at night—you'll stand!
4. The Lord will keep you from all harm;
Your life He watches o'er.
The Lord guards as you come and go
both now and evermore.

Reading: Genesis 12:1-4

Video: CBS Almanac - Grandma Moses

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dTLiG_slQQ

Sermon

I became a feminist not long after Rory was born. I can say that with surety because it was like a switch was flicked in my brain. I remember holding Rory while a lady said to me something along the lines of, “isn't he lovely?! Now you can spend the rest of your life helping him grow into an amazing world changing person!” I remember feeling this flash of rage! How dare she suggest that, at the ripe age of 29, the best I could hope for, was to pour myself into my child so that he could be amazing, since my time was now up. In her defence, that may not have been exactly what she meant, but that was what I heard.

Don't get me wrong, as parents, it is absolutely mine and Mike's job to help our boys grow up to be amazing people, but not at the cost of my self! Can you imagine if people said this to men when their children are born?! “oh well, you had a good run, but it's all about your children now.” I think that poor woman intended to encourage me, but instead she radicalised me.

So that is why I love hearing the stories of people like Grandma Moses, and Abram. People who, at later stages in their lives discover new passions and talents, or who are called by God on a new journey.

(As an aside, Abram's name is later changed to Abraham, and his wife Sarai becomes Sarah, but we're going with Abram and Sarai today because they're the names used in our reading this morning).

Did you notice the Bible contains many stories about older people being called by God into new journeys and experiences?

1. There's 75-year-old Abram in our reading today (Genesis 12:4)
2. Abraham and Sarah later become parents at the ages of 100 and 90, respectively (Genesis 21:5)
3. Moses was 80 and Aaron 83 when they confronted Pharaoh and led God's people out of Egypt (Exodus 7:7)
4. Joshua is "old and advanced in years" when he leads God's people into the promised land (Joshua 13:1)
5. Eli was "very old" when he became a mentor to Samuel (1 Samuel 2:22)
6. Zechariah and Elizabeth conceive and become parents to John the Baptist, despite being well past their childbearing years (Luke 1:5-25)
7. Simeon and Anna meet baby Jesus in the temple, with Simeon having been promised by God that he would not die before meeting the Messiah (Luke 2:25-38). We don't know exactly how old Simeon is, but Luke's Gospel tells us Anna had been married for 7 years, then widowed for 84, so she was probably over 100.

In a world that prioritises youth, gender, and race. God says "I'm not done with you yet. I still have plans for you!"

At the end of Genesis 11, in the verses immediately before where our reading picks up this morning, we read:

³¹ Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there. ³² The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

This causes Rev. Eric Fistler and Rev. Robb McCoy of the Pulpit Fiction podcast to ask, "was God simply nudging Abram to get up and finish the job he had already started?". They suggest that Abram's family moving to Canaan was simply part of the creation narrative, and the calling of Abram was actually the impetus to move toward the completion of creation.

This is a compelling idea, the thought of God saying to Abram, "it's time to finish what we started". It leads me to wonder about the times that we as individuals or church communities start a project, or some good work, or a ministry, only to leave it uncompleted when life happens, or things get difficult, or we burn out.

This isn't to say that there aren't good reasons for things to end, or people to step away, but to acknowledge that sometimes God might call us back with a new

interest or skill that we didn't expect, or reignite an old dream or passion that we thought was long dead.

I read somewhere that Abram and his family settled in Haran for 5 years before God spoke to Abram, calling him on. God is not unreasonable. There was time for Abram and his family to rest and prepare (whether they realised this was what they were doing, or not) for the next season of their lives with this calling and extravagant promise. This move from comfort to discomfort, a step of faith from the known to the unknown.

You might have noticed that Abram doesn't follow God's directive entirely – despite being told to leave his family, Abram brings along his nephew, Lot. But because we know the rest of the story, we know that God still blesses Abram extravagantly. God's promise to make Abram into a "great nation" has two major parts to it – to become a great nation, Abram needs descendants, and land. At this point in the story, he has neither. We know that Abram and his wife Sarai had been unable to have children. With Abram now aged 75, and Sarai around 65, it's not unrealistic for them to think that ship has sailed. As to the other point, the land God is promising Abram already has people living in it, Canaanites – it's not Abram's land, and he does not live there.

Approaching this from a 2026 perspective, I feel uncomfortable. We live in a country that has been colonised, and all of us here have benefitted from that colonisation. Māori, the tangata whenua, however, experienced, among other things, loss of land, loss of culture, loss of language, loss of community, racist policies, comparatively worse outcomes in health and education, and over-representation in prisons – if you want to know more about this, and what we might do about it, go to Building Better Communities on 24 March. I know we're not supposed to judge the past by the standards of the present, but it's hard to believe that God's blessing for one comes at the expense of another.

ME Andrew says, "God making promises to one people automatically has implications for other peoples. A people bearing God's promises cannot keep them to themselves. Benefits given to other people do not single them out as specially meritorious, but as a source of blessing for other peoples."

The path that God calls Abram on is not without challenge – an understatement considering Abram has neither land, nor children. Walter Bruggeman says: "God's call is one 'to abandonment, renunciation, and relinquishment. It is a call for a dangerous departure from the presumed world of norms and security... The narrative knows that such departure from securities is the only way out of barrenness. The whole of the Abrahamic narrative is premised on this seeming contradiction: to stay in safety is to remain barren; to leave in risk is to have hope." God also promises that he will make Abram's name great. Tremper Longman III reminds us, "There is nothing inherently evil about having a great name, or better reputation, but it is God that confers it".

“I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you; I will make your name great; I will bless those who bless you; I will curse those who curse you.” All of this is a gift from God. Abram’s place of promise is a pure gift from God.

God promises to bless Abram so that he will be a blessing to others, ultimately “all the families of the earth shall be blessed”. Depending on how this passage is translated, there are 3 potential meanings:

1. Nations will be blessed through Abram and his descendants
2. Nations will bless themselves, using Abram’s name in their blessing e.g. “may you be like Abram”
3. Nations will themselves gain blessing

Both Luke and Matthew list Abraham in their reciting of the lineage of Jesus, and Abraham and Sarah are mentioned over 115 times outside of Genesis, showing that their story is a part of our story too.

Old Testament Professor Cameron BR Howard says, “God calls Abram to shift his identity from rootedness in his land, family, and household, to being one who is acted upon by God. Abram’s chosen-ness requires a certain amount of loss. And yet, by following God’s call, Abram ushers in God’s blessings for his family and for all the families on earth.”

Our reading today contains specific promises that God made to Abram, and so I don't believe that we can necessarily cut and paste them and apply them to our own lives. That being said, this passage also gives us an indication of what our God is like: we have a God who may call us on a difficult journey, but a God who blesses abundantly; a God who might call us on a path that seems hopeless, but ultimately is still in control, working behind the scenes to make seemingly impossible things happen; a God who invites us into God’s salvific work of bringing blessing to others, regardless of age, gender and race.

I began the service quoting Prof Dennis Olsen, “The text in Genesis 12 draws Abram and Sarai into a journey that leaves behind an old life and looks forward to a future not yet seen. The season of Lent is a season that helps us let go of old commitments and burdens and sets us free to journey into new territories, new promises, new hopes, and new lives”.

During these next few weeks, I encourage you to reflect on where God might be calling you: what might you need to give up? What new talents, or old passions might God want to reignite in you? How might God be wanting to bless you? And, how will you use these blessings to bless others?

Hymn – [Lord Be My Vision](#) (HFTC 545)

1. Lord, be my vision, supreme in my heart
bid every rival give way and depart:
you my best thought in the day or the night
waking or sleeping, your presence my light

2. Lord, be my wisdom and be my true word,
I ever with you and you with me, Lord:
you my great father and I your true child,
once far away, but by love reconciled.

3. Lord, be my breastplate, my sword for the fight:
be my strong armour, for you are my might;
you are my shelter and you my high tower-
raise me to heaven, O Power of my power.

4. I need no riches, nor earth's empty praise:
you my inheritance through all my days;
all of your treasure to me you impart,
high King of heaven, the first in my heart.

5. High King of heaven, when battle is done,
grant heaven's joy to me, bright heaven's sun;
Christ of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Offering Dedication

New life is your gift to us, O God; may these gifts bring new life.

**Hope to the despairing,
confidence to the faltering,
peace to the suffering,
faith to the doubting,
a word to the questioning,
a light for the dying.**

Bless these our gifts, O God, in the name of Jesus Christ, your blessing for us.
Amen

Source: Prayers to Share, Year A, by David Sparks

Community Time – Notices, Celebrations, Needs for Prayer.

Prayer for Others

Faithful One,
for those beginning new journeys, through illness, relocation, or loss, grant courage
and companionship.

For those who wander in grief, unsure where hope resides, shine a small light to
guide their way.

For leaders and nations, teach them to seek wisdom beyond self-interest.

For the Church, that we may travel lightly, trusting your Spirit more than our plans.

For all creation, groaning under the weight of misuse, lead us toward renewal.

And for ourselves, pilgrims of dust and promise, help us to keep walking, one
faithful, fragile step at a time. Amen

Source: Prayers to Share, Year A, by David Sparks

Video – God is Holding your Life, Psalm 121

(Richard Bruxvoort Colligan)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Exuahuz7dr0>

We are now going to watch a video of the song, God is Holding Your Life, by Richard Bruxvoort Colligan. While this is a new song for us, you will be familiar with other songs Richard has written like, God of my Breathing, and On the Path of Justice. This song is his version of Psalm 121, our Psalm for this morning. Richard says:

“This Psalm could be called the ‘travellers psalm’. It seems like there is the voice in this psalm of people singing to those who are going far away from those who are being left behind. One of the last lines... goes like this: God will keep you whether you are going out or coming in, forever. Wherever you go you are in love. You are in God’s love.”

Lift up your eyes, behold the hills

From where will help and rescue come?

We call on One who made the earth

Who blessed the stars, the moon and sun

God is holding your life

God is holding your life

God is holding your life

We believe x2

Turn down your gaze upon the earth

Where is the One who never sleeps

We call on One who guards you now

Your spirit safe in holy keep

God is holding your life
God is holding your life
God is holding your life
We believe *x2*

Venturing out or coming home
‘Neath heat of day or cool of night
We call on One who hears your voice
And comes to heal and keep your life

God is holding your life
God is holding your life
God is holding your life
We believe *x2*

Hymn – Dare to Live the Dream God Gives You

(Bjorlin: Hope Will Not Fail; Tune: [Hyfrodol](#))

1. Dare to live the dream God gives you,
Seek out paths as yet unknown,
For the Spirit leads you onward,
And you never walk alone.

2. Go in courage, walking humbly,
Bearing love none can destroy.
Doing justice, loving mercy,
Go with God and go in joy.

3. When the dread of doubt assails you,
And the road remains unclear,
Yet our faithful God will guide you
Through the doubt and dread of fear.

4. Journey on with true companions,
joining hands and sharing bread,
for we share a common journey
And in friendship we are fed.

5. Dear to live the dream God gives us,
Brave the path, and face the fear,
For the Spirit will unite us;
Christ himself is always near.

Blessing

Go now in faith, though the road is long and the horizon hidden.
Go, carrying both grief and hope, for God travels with you.
May the One who called Abram bless your going out and coming in.
May Christ, the Light of the World, illumine each uncertain step.
And may the Spirit be your companion on every journey, now and always.
Amen

Source: Prayers to Share, Year A, by David Sparks

Sung Amen x3

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