

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Helen Lunn. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you.

Call to worship

Lord, you are our light and our salvation;
our hope in times of fear.
You protect us at times of danger,
and you hear our prayers.
So, Lord, we seek your face,
and we trust in your goodness.

Amen.

Hymn – StF 88 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it her

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77MuS3CbHPo>

- 1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,
praise him in glad adoration.

- 2 Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and
defend thee;
surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee:
ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
who with his love doth befriend thee.

- 3 Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore
thee,
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
then to thy need he like a mother doth speed,
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

- 4 Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is
abounding,
who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue
confounding,
sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.

5 Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises
before him!
Let the amen sound from his people again:
gladly for aye we adore him.

Joachim Neander (1650–1680)

translated by Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878) and Rupert E. Davies (1909–1994)

A time of prayer

Let us pray

Faithful God,
we come to worship you,
conscious of our vulnerability
but rejoicing in your protective love.
Speak your values into our hearts,
your energy into our actions,
and your integrity into our lives,
that we may use our time well and wisely,
and be a church of compassion, conviction and courage.

Eternal God,
we trust you for today.
Inspire us to stay focused and to follow your plan for our lives.
We trust you for tomorrow.
Empower your people to protect the vulnerable
and to proclaim the truth.
We trust you for every day.
Be with us as we journey through life towards your great heart
of love in which there is no fear, no failure and no limits.

Lord, forgive us when the words we speak expose our self-
interest.

Help us, forgive us, and deepen our faith.

Forgive us when the things we do compromise your integrity.

Help us, forgive us, and deepen our faith.

Forgive us when the way we use our resources clashes with
your core values.

Help us, forgive us, and deepen our faith.

As a hen covers her chicks with her wings,
so you cover us with your forgiving love:
drawing us into a new beginning,
a new way of being, a new way of serving;
strengthening, sustaining and surrounding us

with your power and your presence
each day of our lives and beyond.

We praise you, loving God,
that you give each of us enough time
to do all that we are called to do.
Take from us the worry of hurry,
and enable us to delight in your presence with us,
and to share our joy with all who are in need
of hope and friendship and courage.
In Jesus' name we pray – thankfully and hopefully.
Amen.

Bible Readings

Genesis 15:1-12; 17-18

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.
I am your shield,
your very great reward.”

² But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is

Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” ⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

⁶ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

⁷ He also said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

⁸ But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

⁹ So the Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—

Luke 13:31-35

³¹ At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, ‘Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.’

³² He replied, ‘Go and tell that fox, “I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.” ³³ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

³⁴ ‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. ³⁵ Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”’

Time to Reflect

Today we pick up the story of Abram as he continues the long journey on which God has called him. Here we find him doubting God’s continuing presence with him. Are there echoes within our own lives when we have such doubts? Are there times when we need to be reminded of God’s promises to us, both as individuals and as Church?

In both our everyday and our spiritual lives, what we have learned often needs to be reinforced. We need frequent reminders. This is Abram’s situation here. God has to remind him of what has already been promised and why he was called to make this journey, for Abram is eagerly awaiting what is to come, yet is deeply frustrated with waiting for the promise’s fulfilment. Our spiritual journeys are sometimes like that, and we, too, need to recognise that although frustrations and questions arise, God has not abandoned us. God reminds Abram of this.

How are we reminded? We are reminded about this through our continuous reading of the Bible, prayer and also through what we hear from others.

Think of when we learn a new skill: to tie our shoelaces, to drive, to learn a language, our own or another, or something new at school or work. What these all have in common is that, in order to learn, we have to repeat the same actions over and over again, covering the same ground each time. Can you remember how many times you tried to tie your shoelaces before you got it right? Or how many times you reversed into that parking space before you got it right for your driving test? Finally, such actions become second nature and we no longer need to think about them. How many times does God need to remind us of the promise to be with us and to lead us as we journey, before we believe it? Has our trust in God become second nature to us yet or are we continuing to learn as we go through life?

Abram seems to be having problems with trusting in God because he feels nothing is happening; there seems to be no progress toward the fulfilment of God's promises. Are there times when we can identify with Abram and his questioning of God about when the promise to make of him a great nation will be fulfilled? Are there things in our own lives, and in today's world, which make us question and doubt God's promises to his people?

I am sure in this last couple of weeks with what is happening in Ukraine a lot of people will be questioning God.

We have faith in and trust many aspects of our lives: for example, that the service companies will provide water, electricity, gas to our homes; that trains or buses will operate even if not on time; that the post will be delivered. We also have faith and trust in many of the people around us. What makes us have faith in some and not in others? We need to make our own decisions about whether we trust in the people and things of everyday life. Our spiritual lives are no different: explore how some of the same factors apply to this side of our lives. Abram also had to make his own decision about his faith and belief in God.

In this passage Abram declares his belief, his trust and his faith in God and in God's promises and seals the covenant between God and Abram. This is done through sacrifice and ritual. What covenants or agreements do we commit ourselves to, and what do they mean for us?

The marriage service is a covenant between two people. Within the marriage service we find the use of symbols the exchange of rings, for example which we find in the covenant between Abram and God.

Each year within the Methodist Church we have our annual Covenant Service in which we celebrate all that God has done for us, and affirm that we give our lives and choices to God. The traditional Covenant prayer makes it very clear that this affirmation is a serious one that embraces the whole of life, in all its parts. Most people find it quite tough to say, and really mean it. But the prayer is so central to the Christian life that other churches have also adopted it.

The guts and gore of Old Testament sacrifice tend to be very off-putting to a modern audience, but they clearly had significance for Jesus' self-understanding. At the heart of the ritual is a promise. What the two parties are saying is, 'If I break this covenant, may what happened to these animals happen to me.' It was a sign of the magnitude and solemnity of the promise being made. Jesus' death in Jerusalem is seen as the consequence of the failure of the covenant between God and his people, yet it is God himself, in Jesus, who sacrificially pays the price for humanity's sins.

Critics of Christianity berate an historical obsession with guilt, which surely reflects a somewhat backward theology of atonement, one that deals only with what has been done. Yet Abram and Jesus are exercised not by the past, but by the establishment of a new way of being, and a new covenant. This will not merely erase a blemish in order to return things to how they were; rather it will establish a completely new future, one in which the past is put behind us, and where there is progress in the relationship between us and God. The past cannot be undone, but the future is yet to be made.

Films and books celebrate those who can face danger with unflinching heroism, but there can be a fine line between courage and foolishness. Both Abram and Jesus face the sheer terror of mortal danger with a determined steadfastness. How do they do it? They have an abiding sense of God's presence with them and purpose for them, which enables them to trust God through and beyond the danger. They understand that it is their destiny to follow. How do we discern the signs of God's purpose for us when we face situations of danger and challenge?

This last week I have seen images of Christians in Ukraine gathering to worship even with all that is going on around them. I am sure we can learn a lot from them in the fact that they are still continuing to worship God even with the bombs falling around them. I want to finish with some words that have been going around social media as I think they say a lot more than I can.

When you go to church this Sunday and you feel that old temptation to point out what's wrong with the place: The Coffee's lukewarm, the lights are too bright, the temperature is wrong, the music is too loud and, of course, you don't know the songs. Remember in that moment, there's a Ukrainian church gathering in subway tunnels to worship while bombs blast overhead. No coffee, no instrumentalists, no leader pushing them to worship. They're down there in real time and in real life worshipping the King above kings as their world is crumbling down.

Amen

Hymn – StF 531 – What a friend we have in Jesus

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words or listen here

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6c7L_tqQGjc

- 1 What a friend we have in Jesus,
 all our sins and griefs to bear!
 What a privilege to carry
 everything to God in prayer!
 O what peace we often forfeit,
 O what needless pain we bear,
 all because we do not carry
 everything to God in prayer!

- 2 Have we trials and temptations,
 is there trouble anywhere?
 We should never be discouraged:
 take it to the Lord in prayer.
 Can we find a friend so faithful
 who will all our sorrows share?
 Jesus knows our every weakness:
 take it to the Lord in prayer.

3 Are we weak and heavy-laden,
 cumbered with a load of care?
 Precious Saviour, still our refuge —
 take it to the Lord in prayer!
 Do your friends despise, forsake you?
 Take it to the Lord in prayer;
 in his arms he'll take and shield you,
 you will find a solace there.

Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819–1886)

Prayer for Ukraine from The Methodist Church

Loving God, your Son Jesus Christ, wept over Jerusalem.

Today, we weep over Ukraine.

We weep for those uprooted from their homes and lives.

We weep for those cowering in basements.

We weep for those who have witnessed death and destruction
on their streets.

We weep for those separated from parents, from children,
from spouses and siblings.

We are amazed at the resilience of people seeking to comfort
those in need and so we pray for Governments opening up
borders so that Ukrainians can have safe passage.

We pray for churches and individuals providing food, clothing
and shelter.

We pray for medical workers ensuring that shattered bodies
are put back together again.

We pray for ordinary Russians demonstrating and voicing their
disapproval of the military actions in Ukraine.

May the Holy Spirit give us the willpower to turn our tears into
action also.

May we, through our words, prayers and example pursue the
things that make for a just peace in the world today and
especially in Ukraine.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray.

Amen

Prayers of intercession

In the shadow of the cross,
let us pray for the healing of the Church, the world,
and those in need.

We look forward to the coming of the one
who can transform our situations.

Jesus, we look to you for help:

blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

We pray for our persecutors:

those who wish to silence Christians once and for all
in many countries throughout the world.

As Pharisees sought to warn of Herod's plans,
so we pray that you would raise up people
to speak against all persecutions
and to stand for the rights of all to live in religious freedom and
peace.

Jesus, we look to you for help:

blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

We pray for nations that wrestle with hard choices:

to introduce austerity measures in their finances,
to build new structures for democracy,
to address the wide gaps between rich and poor.

As Jesus embraced Jerusalem,
we pray that leaders of nations might repent and seek help.

Jesus, we look to you for help:

blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

We pray for those in need, sickness or other difficulty,
and those close to death.

As a hen gathers her chicks,

so we ask for Christ's protection for those who need it now.

Jesus, we look to you for help:

blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power, and the glory,

for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn – StF 51 – Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father.

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words or listen here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwENmkR31ok>

- 1 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 for ever wilt be:

*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:

*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.*

- 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!

*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.*

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960)

Words and Music: © 1923, renewed 1951, Hope Publishing Company

A prayer of blessing

Teach me, Lord God, to live out my faith;
to show courage when things are tough,
to show love to those in need,
and to be forgiving even when I am hurt.
Help me to follow Jesus.

Amen.

All songs covered by CCL (Europe) Ltd have been reproduced under CCL No. 674557