

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity, Year C, 2022: Proper 14: Genesis 15.1-6; Psalm 33.12-end; Hebrews 11.1-3, 8-16; Luke 12.32-40

Two of our readings this morning concern Abraham, the father of faith. Each reminds us that age and especially a great old age is not a place to hide from God's calling. According to the Biblical account Abraham was about 75 years old when he set out from Ur of the Chaldees to journey towards the land of promise and 100 by the time of Isaac's birth, the child of promise. Abraham holds a place of distinction not only in the Christian faith, but also in the Jewish and Islamic religions. Recently his name has been fastened to a political treatise known as the Abrahamic Accords, which might serve as a hopeful sign of a better ordered co-existence for Jews and Arabs in the Middle East.

We heard during the Genesis reading, 'And Abram believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.' What did Abram believe? He believed that this son, the son of God's promise Isaac born of Sarah, would become the heir instead of Eliezer of Damascus. Inheritance rights were regulated even then. It is through Isaac that Abram's descendants will become as numerous as the stars that light up the heavens. This Abram believed. It is reckoned to him as righteousness. Abram is someone who is right with God as evidenced by his readiness to trust in God's promises to him: the promise of land and the promise of descendants.

All the above told in great concentration for the sake of brevity is mirrored in the life of the Christian and the life of the Church. There are promises. Do we believe them? What are these promises? The promise of the forgiveness of sins. The promise of everlasting life. The promise of abundant life. The promise that we are justified by faith. God is calling today. Are we responding? Where would God have us go? The Church the Body of Christ is a place on earth populated by her members called into

being by God, but she is not only a place on earth, as we read in the Book of Revelation, 'After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.' (7.9)

This morning's readings remind us that the journey that Abraham embarks on, a journey made possible by faith, is about land and it is about people, as much as it is about trusting. It is about being right with God. For these reasons Abraham is someone people of faith within the global 'one God tradition' look to to better understand what faith looks like. Faith is about listening for God. It is about responding to God. It is about trusting in God. God's call leads us away from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

During the week some of Abraham's descendants through faith in Jesus Christ, who have been grafted in the vine by Jesus Christ's saving work, have been meeting in Canterbury, England for the 15th Lambeth Conference. The conference is a gathering of a good number of the bishops of the Anglican Communion of which the Archbishop of Canterbury is the convenor by custom. Canterbury being the oldest bishopric of the Communion dating to the year 597. At Christ Church we have been praying for the Conference and individual national churches of the Communion for some months. Praying for our common witness under Christ and our unity in Christ. Of the 1000 Anglican bishops in active service worldwide at this time 600 of them and their spouses gathered to pray, worship, learn, listen, debate and enjoy one another's company in the fellowship of the Anglican Communion in the assembly of the bishops.

Last Sunday during the main act of worship at Canterbury Cathedral I spotted Bishop David sitting in the choir stalls. The Bishop of Lesotho, a female bishop, gave the sermon. There have been what the organisers describe as 'Calls' on major topics set under the Conference's overall

theme of 'God's Church for God's World', which I assume is an attempt to help the bishops to keep God before them the primacy of God as made known in Jesus Christ in all things in all their trusting, listening, and venturing of positions on this or that issue. The calls are nine in number resisting the temptation of a second decalogue...

They are Mission and Evangelism, (Being a) Safe Church, Anglican Identity, Reconciliation, Human Dignity, the Environment and Sustainable Development, Christian Unity, Inter-Faith Relations, Discipleship, and Science and Faith. A number of keynote addresses can be found on YouTube as well as a great deal of material on the web to do with the Conference. The call that received the most attention was predictably the one on Human Dignity. It is well known that this topic which must also address sexuality is always going to be divisive, so much so that a good number of Anglican bishops did not accept the Archbishop's invitation in the first place and stayed home. Only 600 of 1000 possible bishops attended.

Each call is of importance and depending on where you sit you will prioritise them accordingly. I suspect a few of us would have loved to have heard the different voices speak, listened to the exchanges of views immersed in prayer, soaked in God's word through the daily Bible studies on 1 Peter within the worldwide Anglican Communion gathered in one place. It is an achievement that the Conference did take place given the differences within the Communion and the need to postpone the Conference for two years due to the pandemic. It is an achievement that a majority of active bishops made the journey, which would have been a long one for some. All I suspect will go home enriched. Some more encouraged than others. Some more disturbed more than others. Some more joyful than others. Some more belligerent. Some a little more sorrowful. Others a little more pensive. No winners...

What brought these men and women together was and is their common faith in Jesus the Messiah, son of God, Saviour. Like Abraham long before them these men and women left their homes to meet in Canterbury as people of Christian faith trusting in God's promises and in the knowledge that God is the Lord of the Church and that each according to the best of their ability and in humility before God and their fellow human beings is seeking to be faithful to their unique calling under God within the Body of Christ, the Church. Paul, we remind ourselves, already had to make an appeal to the church in Corinth on unity as early as the year 50. His words then are worth heeding today as we observe people bending and moulding the Church to their image rather than being moulded in the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, emulating in all things him who prayed, Not my will but thine, God Father, be done. Paul writes,

'Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose.' (1 Corinthians 1:10) So be it. **Amen.**