

June 14, 2020: Promises of Faith

With Scott Martin, LLWL

About Scott: Scott Martin was born and raised in Georgetown and lives there still. He is active in the Christian education life of St. Andrews United Church, Georgetown.

Let us centre ourselves for worship. Have a candle ready if you wish to.

OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, longing for your love, we pray!
In the midst of confusion and loss, we pray.
In need of your help and guidance, we pray.
For your protection and your love, we pray.
Not only for our own need, but for the needs of others, we pray.
To be messengers of love, to be a light in the shadows,
to bring hope and to carry joy every step of our way, we pray.
To seed and nurture love with the love we receive
from you and the Holy Spirit, we pray.
In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen!

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

Oh, what a lovely light!
It is the light of the Christ in our midst!

Light your candle

Filled with this light,
Jesus bids us shine our own lovely light.
May it be so for each of us. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING

Genesis 18:1-15 – The Three Visitors

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on – since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself,

saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

Matthew 9:35–10:8 – The Harvest Is Great, the Laborers Few

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment."

MESSAGE: What promises have you made?

This message has been prepared by Scott Martin, LLWL, for the Faith United Milton congregation on June 14, 2020 which is also shared with Palermo United. Any comments you might like to pass along after reading it can be sent to smartin6927@gmail.com ©Scott Martin 2020. Provided here with permission.

VIDEO: We are also pleased to be able to offer you Scott's message in video format. Scott has provided this link to expand your worship experience:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mq-qoxl6Rko&t=10s>

In this season of Pentecost, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, or to some people, celebrating the birthday of Christian faith. In today's Old and New Testament readings, faith plays a major part. Speaking of faith, how do we welcome the Lord in our lives? Do we look and see if he is coming, or do we mind our own business, waiting for God to surprise us. Do we act or react?

Today's Old Testament reading, tells us to act.

In the Genesis reading, Abraham is sitting at the entrance to his tent, nodding off to sleep because of the heat of day, when out of the corner of his eye he sees three men approach

nearby. Something strange stirs deep inside Abraham when he sees them; it's not fear but, excitement and anticipation. Abraham was very pro-active in providing hospitality for these strangers, who were revealed to be more than just travelers. They turn out to be messengers from God, entering into the life of Abraham and Sarah and bearing witness to God's promises on their behalf.

The strangers promise Abraham and Sarah that in due season they will have a son. Sarah, listening to this, laughed to herself. She said, "Is there anything too wonderful for the Lord?" This question echoes in all of our places of doubt and disbelief when we wonder at the promises of God. This is a powerful example where humanity often finds itself when it sits in the presence of God.

Have you ever been in the cash register line at the grocery store? There is only one cashier open, and the line-ups are long. Other people's carts are full and you are waiting and waiting, and there is a sign of relief when over the loud speaker you hear, "Cashiers to the front please". With these images we hear the words of Jesus in the New Testament from Matthew when he says, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few, therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest".

Now Jesus didn't summon more cashiers, but he did call out his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out and cure every disease and every sickness. The disciples carried a simple message: God is real, God is present, God is near us. The disciples had a simple method: go to the needy, the sick and blind; go to the people who have a real felt need for God's help in their lives. Jesus says to them: "Healthy people don't need a doctor; it's the sick who do. Go to the people who need the power and presence of God to help them.

I knew someone recently in my community was sick during the Covid 19 pandemic. Since I was off from work, I decided to make the person a pot of soup. I added in a pie for good measure and made up a "get well" card and put in the words of the United Church Creed, "You are not alone, you live in God's world, we are thinking of you".

Now I am no disciple, I am just a common and ordinary person trying to be a good friend and neighbour, going to someone who was sick. However, looking at the make-up of the twelve disciples, maybe anyone of us could have been one. Jesus chose 12 common and ordinary people to do his work. Not one of them was a religious professional. Jesus gives the 12 disciples clear instructions and then sends them forth to do his work and proclaim his message. However, instructions only take us so far, the faithful must move beyond Jesus himself.

Now, let's be honest, how many of you can name all 12 without looking them up? A show of hands? Go ahead, shout out their names if you want to. Now there are easy ones to remember: Peter a fisherman by trade (I hate fishing, yuk), James and John, Andrew, brother of Peter, Judas (it wouldn't be a Easter story without his involvement), John, Thomas the doubter (I will admit I doubt a lot of things in my life so I can relate to him), along with

Matthew, Simon and Philip. Can you name the last two? I know I never can remember them, Bartholomew and Thaddeus – I forget them every time.

Jesus chose 12 common, ordinary and imperfect human beings. Now the 12 disciples were brought into faith by invitation given by Jesus. How many of you can say they were brought to faith by a religious leader? How many of you were brought to church or faith by a mother, father, grandmother or grandfather, brother or sister? I ask you those questions to prove a point: that Jesus' way of doing things is still active and well today – that is, people are still brought to faith and church by common and ordinary people.

Ever heard the phrase: “to be a worker in the kingdom of God”? In Jesus time that would have meant to “go to your neighbours in need with the Gospel”. Fast forward a couple of thousand years and that definition might be a bit different. Forget a thousand years, how about 100 days ago. In January you might have sung in the choir, ushered in church, folded bulletins or attended worship in person, all things people for the most part did together.

In March that definition was different. We are, for the most part, isolated from the world, so that included checking up on people, phoning them, picking up food for those that can't. We banged pots in the streets to support our front-line workers. Someone in my subdivision made a rock garden called the “Rock Garden of Hope”. Over the last couple of weeks people have been painting their own rocks with words of inspiration. Another person hung masks on her front porch for people to take if they don't have one. So far, she has made over 1400 masks! Someone made a book exchange box on their front lawn. Someone else posted a new joke every day on their front lawn, sensing we need a good laugh to get us through these tough times. I'm sure you have similar stories in your neighborhoods.

All of these examples are done in the Kingdom of God, showing our neighbours the love, compassion and hope they deserve.

Just like Sarah in the Old Testament reading, what promises from God do we find ourselves laughing at or what are the promises that we have not allow ourselves to believe. My wife Barb and I were discussing the other day how Canada can't seem to catch a break. A new tragedy seems to hit us every day. Like Thomas, we have doubt and disbelief in the world. Unlike Thomas, we as Christians will believe in faith, it's that faith that allows us to believe that the world will get better, that we'll be allowed to worship in our churches again, and seeing families and friends in person.

Some people believe that we should be able to re-open our churches right away. I'm a believer that during this pandemic that our churches never closed – we're more than just a building and the four walls. I believe that people are the church, not just inside the church but it's what we do on the outside that really matters

So, I ask you what promises will you make to your family, your friends or your neighbors, all people who are in need – promises made and kept, all in the Kingdom of God. Promises kept not because it is expected of us but, because it is the right thing to do.

Remember, humanity is depending on us
We say this in Jesus name, Amen

HYMN – “*Promise*” a music video from Prayer House, Kigali, Rwanda
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT7i5zpqGuQ>

CLOSING PRAYER AND SENDING FORTH

As we go out into the world
May the blessing of Peace show us how to choose life.
May the blessing of friendship be our companion.
May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with all of you, each second of each day.
We say this in his name
Amen

GO NOW IN PEACE: Faith video (link takes you to Youtube)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdUap5fcp4k>