

**HAGERSVILLE UNITED CHURCH &
SPRINGVALE UNITED CHURCH
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28th, 2021**

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REGIONAL COUNCIL PRAYER CYCLE

Bethel-Cooks Mills

Second Sunday of Lent

*“Lent is an opportunity to contemplate what our Lord really did for us
on the Cross...and it wasn't pretty. But ultimately, the purpose of Lent
does not stop at sadness and despair, it points us to the hope of the
Resurrection and the promise that God made to all of us.”*

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Welcome this day to the second step on our Lenten Journey.

P: We come with great hope and expectation as we walk the way of Christ.

L: Today's journey will demand much of us.

P: Lord, make us ready to offer ourselves to you.

L: Come, let us begin again the wondrous excursion.

P: Let us place our lives in God's abiding love.

OPENING HYMN: #234 Let Us with a Gladsome Mind

1 Let us with a gladsome mind
praise our God forever kind;
whose great mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

2 God, with all-commanding might,
filled the new-made world with light;
for God's mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

2

3 God has with a gracious eye
looked upon our misery;
for God's mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

4 All things living God does feed,
with full measure meets their need;
for God's mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

5 Let us with a gladsome mind
praise our God forever kind;
whose great mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

OPENING PRAYER

God, you have given us everything. What can we give in return for our lives? Be our guide on our Lenten journey. Help us to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus. We welcome the chastening direction in our lives as we worship you today.

CHILDREN'S TIME

CHILDREN'S SONG

A LENTEN CREED

We believe that our lives are held within the encircling love of God, who knows our names and recognises our deepest needs.

We believe that Christ is the divine Child of the living God, and that his grace is like living waters that can never be exhausted.

We believe in the birthing, renewing, enabling Spirit of God who yearns over our welfare as a mother yearns for her child.

We believe that God is in the arid desert as well as in green pastures, and that hard times and disciplines are also loving gifts.

We believe that our journey has a purpose and a destination, and that our path leads to a human glory we cannot yet imagine.

We believe that in the church we are fellow pilgrims on the road, and that we are called to love one another as God loves us.

This is our faith and we are humbled to profess in Jesus the Christ.
Amen

SCRIPTURE READING

Genesis 17:1-7

New International Version

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty^[a]; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ²Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵No longer will you be called Abram^[b]; your name will be Abraham,^[c] for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

Genesis 17:15-17

¹⁵ God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18 - God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Issac, the child they waited so long for ... Abraham offers, but God provides a substitute at the last minute, and showers blessings on Abraham for not refusing.

MESSAGE

To Walk in a Promise Abraham fell to his face and laughed. Laughed out loud. Laughed until he was out of breath. Even as he stayed low and face down in an ancient posture of reverence, he laughed. So often, when we tell the story of this family and their relationship with God, we talk about Sarah's laugh in the face of Divine Impossibility. Her son Isaac was named for her laughter. But, Abraham laughed, too. He was 75 years old and still going by the name Abram when God first promised him children and land on which to thrive. To his credit, he believed God at that first promise and mostly did what God asked him to over the next 25 years. Abram usually trusted God when God makes a promise. But he and Sarai were well-passed the years that most people conceive and they had no child. He was worried that one of his slaves would be an heir. But God confirmed the promise. Abram and Sarai would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and God said they would have land for a home. They do try to get around the promise, uncertain that it would ever happen, Sarai convinced Abram to try to conceive with her slave Hagar. It is not at all clear that Hagar wanted to be a part of this arrangement. Abram could have said no, but he didn't. Hagar had a son, Ishmael. God took care of her and child when Sarai and Abram wouldn't. God would eventually find them a home in the wilderness. But this child, Ishmael, would not be the promised child. This is where we come to our reading for today, where God makes one more promise of children and land,

Abram and Sarai do not yet have a son together. They have been following God's promise for nearly 25 years. God sees potential in this family and assures them that a richer future is in store for them. Abram hears this promise and he believes, but he laughs out loud anyway. It has been twenty-five years. There have been so many moves, even a war, and he has one son, even if it's not with Sarah. He will do what God says, but he has to laugh. He no longer has any sense of how long this promise will take to manifest. You remember, Noah had been made a covenant, too. God placed a rainbow in the sky as a reminder that he would never destroy the earth again. It was a promise to all of creation, not just one particular family.

God's covenant with Abram is different. While God will remain the God of all the world, this part of the story is about a particular promise to this family and their descendants. While Abram and Sarai didn't do anything

to gain God's favour at the beginning of this story, once they decided to follow God and believe in the covenant, Sarah had a child and his name was Issac. Soon after, God would ask something of them. This portion of the story is the moment where God set forth the expectations for their side of the covenant. They would have to do something to demonstrate their faith. First, God would change their names, to Abraham and Sarah. A name change in the Bible often signifies a new or changing relationship with God. There is a second sign that's not part of our reading, God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Issac, the child they waited so long for ... Abraham offers, but God provides a substitute at the last minute, and showers blessings on Abraham for not refusing.

Remember the rainbow God gave Noah and his family, a symbol in the sky after the flood as a reminder that God is a God of a promise. Noah trusted God and Abraham trusted God and the covenant God had promised. These symbols and names remind God's people to walk with God and to trust in God promises.

This is the season of Lent. It is a time for telling the stories of God's promises, even in the midst of that which is challenging in human life. It is a time for remembering all the ways that God calls to us, as God called to Noah and to Abraham and Sarah, inviting into both new life and greater responsibility. Our faith is richer for remembering these promises, and discerning new ways to live them out.

Maybe, we'll find ourselves praying and laughing at the same time, completely unclear how God will make a way with us but we have to have faith and to choose to trust that God will. He knows where he is taking you. Amen

HYMN: #657 He Leadeth Me

1 He leadeth me: O blessed thought!
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

[Refrain:]

**He leadeth me! He leadeth me!
By his own hand he leadeth me!**

**His faithful follower I would be,
for by his hand he leadeth me!**

2 Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom,
sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,
by waters calm, o'er troubled sea,
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me. **[Refrain]**

3 Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine,
nor ever murmur nor repine,
content, whatever lot I see,
since 'tis my God that leadeth me. **[Refrain]**

4 And when my task on earth is done,
when by thy grace, the victory's won,
even death's cold wave I will not flee,
since God through Jordan leadeth me. **[Refrain]**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

You stop us in our tracks, O Lord, with your reminder that discipleship is not a "sometime" thing. We are called to place our whole lives in your care; to follow you; to serve you by caring for others, not just once in a while, but always. We admit that we're not always ready to do this. The demand is great; the need is great; our energies are limited. Help us to place our trust and our lives in your care. You will give us the strength and courage that we will need for this step on the journey. Be with us. Help us to remember that your love is poured out for all your people; you are never far away. It is in Jesus' Name, we pray. AMEN.

LORD'S PRAYER

CLOSING HYMN: #675 Will Your Anchor Hold

1 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

Refrain:

**We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!**

2 Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rage, and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your bark o'erflow? **[Refrain]**

3 Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
while your anchor holds within the veil. **[Refrain]**

4 Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past for evermore? **[Refrain]**

SENDING FORTH

The step of discipleship requires commitment and faith. Go now in peace, bringing the good news of Jesus' love to all people. Do not be afraid. God is with you. AMEN.

CHORAL AMEN

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Larger Steak

One night at the dinner table, the wife commented, "When we were first married, you took the small piece of steak and gave me the larger one. Now you take the large piece and leave me the smaller. You don't love me anymore..."

"Nonsense, darling," replied the husband, "you just cook better now."