



Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2025  
Epiphany 5  
Evensong

Genesis 13:14–18  
Psalm 119:145–152  
Galatians 3:15–22  
The Rev'd Ben Falcon

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Our Genesis reading gives us a tiny snippet from the story of Abraham. These short verses detail the third time God speaks to Abram (he is not named Abraham until several chapters further in Genesis). If you have the time and inclination to take in the larger story, you'll find the whole Abraham narrative spread through Genesis chapters 12 to 25.

Abraham, the wise man from the east who is called by God to the Promised Land and who leaves the Chaldees to journey to Canaan. This kind of continues the themes of the Epiphany season. It is a story about that desire to follow where God leads, not knowing what you will find. It's fuelled by a desire to see God and know God. To befriend God.

Neither Abraham, nor the wise men from the East, knew exactly what they were looking for, and nor did they know when or exactly where they might find it. But they had been prompted by God, and they responded faithfully to that prompting.

It's that impulse St Augustine which beautifully articulates in a prayer from his autobiographical *Confessions*, 'Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee' that prompting to seek God, to embark on a journey without being entirely sure of the route or destination, knowing only that somehow it will bring us closer to God.

Another quote I always find deeply comforting; Thomas Merton prays,

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following Your Will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

When we look at the life of Abraham, we see the story of his life punctuated with these brief moments of encounter with God. But there is a lot between each of those moments. Battles are fought, there are family disputes, financial stresses, and, frankly, there is very little indication along the way that God is fulfilling the promises of giving Abraham innumerable children and vast lands.

Abraham's wife Sarah does eventually give give birth to a child - Isaac, and so God's promises begin to be fulfilled. But when Sarah dies, Abraham stills owns no land and has to purchase a field with a tomb, just to have somewhere to bury his beloved wife.

By the time Abraham himself dies, nothing much has changed. He has two sons and one field.

It seems a bit anti-climactic really.

But Abraham's story is a realistic portrayal of the spiritual life.

I venture to suggest many of us don't very often have deep spiritual encounters with God. According to the book of Genesis, Abraham had only about 7 during his 175 year lifespan.

A lot of the spiritual life is made up of the ordinary stuff that fills so much of Abraham's story in Genesis- navigating family and finances, trying to make good decisions and trying to cultivate healthy relationships with those around us.

As Merton said, sometimes we won't see the road ahead of us, and we will struggle to interpret our own motivations - are we trying to love God or are we working hard on projecting our best false self? Like Merton, sometimes all we can do is say, "I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing."

Life is rarely straightforward, and the kinds of things we want to achieve or we want God to do, are rarely as straightforward as our plans, and often God has some different and better in mind, which we don't see in the moment.

Canon Peter Burke reminded me recently of some wisdom from Julian of Norwich:

When we think that our prayers have not been answered we should not become depressed over it. I am certain that God is telling us that we must wait for a better time, more grace, or that a better gift will be given us.

As St Paul is at pains to explain here in Galatians (and even more elaborately in his letter to the Romans), God's modus operandi doesn't look like the clear cut, tidy, legalistic plans that we humans like to make. God works in relational mode. God doesn't give wages for payment by contract. God's economy operates by promise and gift and grace. That's messier, and it's not legalistic. It's good for us that it's not. God is biased always in our favour to offer grace and promise and gift.

Perhaps not all of us, but some, maybe many, here this evening are carrying burdens and stresses. We look for relief, we ask God, 'how long?' - perhaps we are tempted to try and scheme to fix problems in our own strength only to feel frustration when our schemes fail. This is the struggle of the life of faith.

The answer isn't that God will magically make everything better the second we pray. But God will offer us friendship and grace.

Like Merton, we may sometimes say, 'Lord God, I have no idea where I am going... but I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you'. And so we continue to pray, we continue to bring God into our life in worship and prayer and faith.

Like Abraham, we don't always see God's promises being dramatically and instantly fulfilled. But like Abraham we persevere in a relationship with the God who wants to befriend us.

And I'll leave you with those words of Julian once more:

When we think that our prayers have not been answered we should not become depressed over it. I am certain that God is telling us that we must wait for a better time, more grace, or that a better gift will be given us.

Amen.