

**Second Sunday after Pentecost  
June 14, 2020  
Living Faith Lutheran Church, Sechelt, BC**

**GATHERING**

**Gathering Song**        #733        "Great is Thy Faithfulness"

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Mother/Father;  
there is no shadow of turning with thee;  
thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not;  
as thou hast been, thou forever will be.

*Refrain*

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.

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. *Refrain*

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! *Refrain*

Greeting    The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
                    and the companionship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

**Prayer of the Day**

God of compassion, you have opened the way for us and brought us to yourself. Pour your love into our hearts, that overflowing with joy, we may freely share the blessings of your realm and faithfully proclaim the good news of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

**WORD**

First Reading        Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup>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." <sup>6</sup>And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." <sup>7</sup>Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. <sup>12</sup>So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?"

<sup>13</sup>The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' <sup>14</sup>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." <sup>15</sup>But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

<sup>1</sup>The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. <sup>2</sup>Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup>Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. <sup>4</sup>And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup>Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup>Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." <sup>7</sup>And she said, "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

## Second Reading Romans 5:1-8

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

<sup>3</sup>And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

<sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Holy Gospel          Matthew 9:35-10:8  
*From "The Message" by Eugene Peterson*

<sup>35-38</sup> Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, and healed their diseased bodies, healed their bruised and hurt lives. When he looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. "What a huge harvest!" he said to his disciples. "How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!" <sup>10</sup> <sup>1-4</sup> The prayer was no sooner prayed than it was answered. Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives. This is the list of the twelve he sent:

Simon (they called him Peter, or "Rock"),  
Andrew, his brother,  
James, Zebedee's son,  
John, his brother,  
Philip,  
Bartholomew,  
Thomas,  
Matthew, the tax man,  
James, son of Alphaeus,  
Thaddaeus,  
Simon, the Canaanite,  
Judas Iscariot (who later turned on him).

<sup>5-8</sup> Jesus sent his twelve harvest hands out with this charge:

"Don't begin by traveling to some far-off place to convert unbelievers. And don't try to be dramatic by tackling some public enemy. Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously.

## Sermon

Pentecost 2a, June 14, 2020

Genesis 17 – 18

LFCL

Frederick Buechner tells the story something like this—  
not exactly like this but something like this.

They had had quite a life, the old couple.

Years before, they had gotten off to a good start in Mesopotamia  
with a nice house in the suburbs, a two-car garage,  
a colour TV in the family room and a BBQ pit in the backyard.

They had a room all fixed up for when the babies started coming,  
and with their health and each other,  
and with their families supporting them,  
they had what is known as “a future.”

Sarah bought her clothes at Holt Renfrew, did some volunteer work at the hospital,  
and was president of the Greater Chaldea Golf and Tennis Club.

Abraham, for his part, was pulling down an excellent salary at his job,  
enjoyed generous fringe benefits including free health care,  
and had a solid retirement plan to go along with it.

And then they got religion. . . or, rather, religion got them.

Abraham was convinced that what God wanted them to do  
was to pull up stakes and head out to Canaan—the Promised Land--  
where God promised to make Abraham  
the father of a great nation—which would, in turn,  
be a blessing to all other nations. And so that’s what they did.

They put their house on the market  
and gave the colour TV to the hospital.  
They got a good price for the crib and bassinet  
at a neighbourhood garage sale because they had never been used.

Abraham wrote an eloquent letter of resignation to the president of the company  
and received an equally eloquent one in reply  
assuring Abraham that there would always be a job waiting for him  
if he ever changed his mind and came back to Chaldea.

“If he ever regained his senses” was the way  
the president thought it should read because,  
although he believed firmly that religion was a good thing  
like exercising regularly and eating vegetables,  
there was no sense going overboard on it.

Anyway, off they went in their economical, mid-sized station wagon  
with a U-Haul trailer behind. . .and a handful of friends and relatives  
who, if they didn't share Abraham's religious convictions  
decided to at least hitch their wagons to Abraham's star.

And among the people they took was Sarah's brother, Lot. . .  
which turned out to be a bad mistake.

And I say that because, after quite a number of adventures  
along the way, when they finally limped into the Promised Land,  
a rather nasty situation developed between Abraham and his in-laws.

Lot and his crowd claimed that the place they had staked out  
wasn't big enough for the both of them. . .  
and Abraham's crowd said they couldn't agree more.  
And so, as a way out of the dilemma, Abraham proposed  
that they divide the land in two and each take half.

And here's where Abraham made another big mistake.  
He gave Lot the first choice. . .and, of course, Lot chose the half  
around the Jordan River that was fertile pastureland  
leaving Abraham with the disaster area known locally as "Dead Man's Gulch."

As Buechner puts it so delightfully:  
While all of Canaan was called the "Promised Land,"  
some parts were obviously more promising than others.

Now, it wasn't long after that that Sarah and Abraham  
started getting a little itchy about seeing the child. . .or children. . .  
that they had been promised by God—thinking that God's timing  
was off by a few years—maybe 50 or 60 or so--  
and that the hope of birthing a baby  
at her advanced age was an near impossibility.

And so, as a result of their age and situation, Sarah suggested. . .  
and Abraham agreed with the suggestion  
that they engage the services of a surrogate mother—  
Sarah's Egyptian slave, a girl named Hagar.

You see, in those days, a child traced its ancestry via its father  
and so, no matter which of a man's wives gave birth,  
the child would be the man's—and, in this way,  
Abraham and Sarah would take the fulfillment  
of God's plan for a son into their own hands. . .  
and they would solve the whole problem.

And sure enough, the Bible tells us that Abraham went into Hagar  
and she conceived. And it only took a short while  
after her swollen belly started showing for Sarah to despise Hagar--  
(No surprise there, eh?)--  
and Sarah immediately started the worst argument  
that she and Abraham had ever had in their marriage.

She wagged her finger at Abraham and blamed him for agreeing to her idea.

“May the wrong done to me be on you!” Sarah cried.

“I gave my slave-girl to your embrace,  
and when she saw that she had conceived,  
she looked on me with contempt.”

In other words, when Hagar got pregnant, she pitied Sarah—  
she pitied her owner and her . . .and that condescending look  
and attitude really got Sarah’s shorts in a knot.

Now, whether he was deeply in love with Sarah  
and was ashamed of his participation in her apparent humiliation. . .  
or whether he was so scared of her  
that he refused to stand up to her—whatever his reasons,  
Abraham makes the decision to take Hagar  
out into the desert where he pretty much dumps her without water  
at a place somewhere beyond Beersheba.  
And, that, we conclude, is the end of the matter.

But, as any faithful Muslim can tell you, it is not the end of the matter at all.  
To be sure, the Bible pretty much loses interest in Hagar. . .  
and her soon-to-be-born son, Ishmael. . .but the Koran does not.  
In fact, our Muslims sisters and brothers,  
who claim descendancy from Ishmael—  
that is, who claim him as their ancestor in the same way  
that our Jewish sisters and brothers claim his half-brother, Isaac,  
as their ancestor—Muslims remember the story a little differently.

There, in that desolate valley where Hagar was close to dying of thirst,  
Allah (which is the Arabic name for “God”) Allah comes to her  
to assure her that she will be all right. And, indeed, soon after,  
Hagar finds water in the small hills of Zamzam--  
an obscure location in the western part of the Arabian desert  
that would one day come to be known as none other than Mecca—  
the holiest of all the shrines of Islam.

Now, the Bible only mentions in passing that Hagar eventually returns  
to live with Sarah and Abraham and gives birth to a son, Ishmael,  
who Abraham, now 86 years old, claims as his own—  
although he knows Ishmael is not the son he was promised by God.

That's a bit of the history behind this morning's First Lesson. . .  
but before we look closer at it, I want to make the point here  
that minimizing the attempt that Abraham and Sarah made  
to sire a child is to minimize or dismiss a reality  
of the human experience when it comes  
to trusting the promise of God.

I mean, just like us, Abraham's behaviour. . .and Sarah's, too. . .  
in their failed attempt to "fix the problem" by themselves. . .  
their attitudes and actions are not untypical of how our faith  
in God's promise and presence is so easily forgotten . . .  
or, at the least, so easily shaken.

And that brings us to today's reading from Genesis 18 which,  
by the way, follows immediately on the heels  
of a very strange and mysterious story  
about how God comes to Abraham in a dream at night  
to renew the promise God had made to Abraham decades before  
that Abraham will be the father of a great nation.

And we call this promise of God a "covenant".  
Now, a "covenant" is not a contract,  
nor even a signed, sealed and delivered agreement.  
Instead, a covenant is rather more like a vow—  
as in a marriage vow in which each party promises  
their fidelity and trust to the other.

Anyway, shortly after this weird and almost frightening story  
of God's making or renewing the covenant, Abraham gets a visit—  
a visit by three strangers. . .or one. . .depending on which verses we read.

Sometimes the passage refers to God alone with the words,  
"The Lord appeared to Abraham. . ." or "The Lord said. . ."  
and those verses are interwoven with verses that refer  
to "three men" to whom Abraham shows hospitality.

Now, while some have seen these verses as oblique references to the Trinity—  
the Triune nature of God--the more probable explanation  
of this movement from one to three and back again  
may be the author's way of expressing God's elusive nature  
and so prevent us from putting God into neat categories  
and, instead, be compelled to recognize that God is the ultimate mystery—  
a mystery we cannot fully describe or understand. . .let alone control.

Maybe we could that these verses remind us that God is, as the old phrase puts it:  
"An enigma wrapped in a riddle and shrouded in mystery".

And we cannot control or manage or manipulate this mysterious one  
who promises a very aged couple a child.

And although Sarah laughs at the very idea of her having a baby at 90,  
they eventually name that boychild “Isaac” which means “Laughter.”

So, get this: One of the founders of the people of Israel is named “Laughter”—  
which, in some delightful way is a reminder to us. . .and to everyone. . .  
that our past accomplishments, present wellbeing  
and our hope for the future are not to be based  
on our supposed superiority or pride, success or creativity. . .  
or even our careful attention to maintaining proper social distancing.

Instead, our hope is to be based in and based on the God,  
who, from the very start, did laughingly impossible things—  
like creating something from nothing simply by speaking. . .  
or by breathing into mud and giving it life. . .  
or raising man to new life.

Just because we don’t understand what God is up to in our lives  
or in this world at this time doesn’t mean that the idea  
of God’s promise to us of God’s presence with us  
is laughable, or ridiculous, or to be seen or taken  
as nothing more than a fairy tale.

And so, in these days of living during a pandemic  
which we cannot entirely control or eliminate  
or even fully understand scientifically or psychologically--  
in these days when so many things in our lives  
and in our world are unknown and uncertain,  
we have this promise of God to hold on to  
and sustain us on this journey—  
the promise of God to be with us. . .a promise of certainty—  
the certainty of God’s steadfast love and mercy and care.

In a videotaped sermon entitled “Certainty in an Age of Uncertainty”,  
Otis Moss III, an African-American preacher from Chicago,  
speaks eloquently and passionately about our need  
to hold firmly to God’s promise to come alongside us and stand with us—  
to hold on to that promise even if we cannot see God right next to us.

And to conclude his dramatic and compelling sermon,  
he says something like this: “I have been standing here  
in the aisle of this church telling you about God’s presence with us  
even though and even when we cannot see God—  
because God is outside the frame. . .just outside the frame.



And then the camera backs up and we see the wife of Otis Moss  
sitting on the bench right next to where he is standing—  
where she has been the whole time but we couldn't see her  
because the "frame"—that is, the "picture frame" bordering all four sides  
of the video hasn't been large enough for her to be included in it.

But when the camera backs up and the frame is enlarged,  
she is there. . .suddenly seen there. . .meaning, as Moss puts it,  
that that's how it is with God's presence:  
That God is always there right next to us,  
just "outside the frame".

And so we are able to hold on to the truth of Paul's words  
in today's Second Reading where he says that  
". . .suffering produces endurance,  
and endurance produces character,  
and character produces hope—  
and hope does not disappoint us  
because God's love has been poured into our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."

So, regardless of whether our frame these day, in this world, at this time  
is too narrowly focused on the suffering or sorrow  
or loss or anger or loneliness or death. . .

or whatever is immediately in front of us or inside us  
which therefore prevents us from seeing God next to us. . .  
what is sure. . .what is reliable. . .what is assured. . .

what is certain in this time of uncertainty  
is that God is always there beside us. . .  
"just outside the frame". . . .  
and the promise of that presence  
does not and will not. . .will never. . .will not ever. . .disappoint us.

Amen. SDG

**Hymn of the Day**                      #795                      "God, My Lord, My Strength"

God, my Lord, my strength, my place of hiding  
and confiding in all needs by night and day;  
though foes surround me, and Satan mark his prey, God shall have his way.

Christ in me, and I am freed for living and forgiving,  
heart of flesh for lifeless tone; now bold to serve him,  
now cheered his love to own, nevermore alone.

Up, weak knees and spirit bowed in sorrow! No tomorrow shall arise to beat you down; God goes before you and angels all around; on your head a crown.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared, worried, divided and wounded world. *A brief silence.*

Holy One, you bring us together and call us your own. Bless theologians, teachers, and preachers who help us grow in faith, *following the examples set by Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus whom we remember today*). Guide your church, that we might be a holy and hopeful people. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy One, the whole earth is yours. Where there is fire, bring cool air and new growth. Where there is flooding, bring abatement. Where there is drought, bring rain. Where infections run rampant and deaths results, heal, comfort and protect us. Inspire us to care for what you have provided. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy One, we have created divisions you did not want nor will you own. Where there is conflict and division over race and colour, raise up leaders who work to develop reconciliation among all and justice for all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy One, you care for those who are harassed and helpless. Protect and defend those who are abused, threatened or afraid. Heal those who are sick. Feed all who hunger, especially those in our parish and in our families or circles of friends who are dealing with all manner of difficulties of body, mind or spirit, *especially Bud and Erika, Tory and Dorothy, Michelle and Jim, Gwen and Ed, Ingrid, Marianne and Kathy, and those we bring before you now in the words of our lips or the whispers of our hearts. . .* Empower all whose voices have gone or still go unheard, particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour. Help us respond to the pressing needs of our neighbours by standing with them examining and changing our own attitudes and actions. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy One, you provide a plentiful harvest of gifts and resources. Prepare us to gather the talents and energy of the people in our congregation(s), that we might discover new ways of living and serving and being your followers and your disciples. Help us, when we feel abandoned or afraid to remember that you are with us now and always so that we do not lose heart. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy One, you bring all people to yourself. We give thanks for the holy people who have gone before us (*especially Rick, Dave, Liila and our loved ones whom we name now in silence. . .*). Sustain us in your mission until the day you bear us up to join the saints in light. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Sharing of the Peace**

May the peace of Christ be with, among and upon us all. . .and always.

### **Offering Prayer**

God of mercy and grace, the eyes of all wait upon you, and you open your hand in blessing. Fill us with good things at your table, that we may come to the help of all in need, through Jesus Christ, our redeemer and Lord. **Amen.**

## **MEAL**

*In preparation for the meal, please have bread and wine (or grape juice) near at hand to be taken, blessed, broken and shared. Use of a separate glass and a piece of bread for each participant are strongly encouraged. You are also invited to raise the bread and cup as directed. (You may also wish to make the sign of the cross upon each element when speaking or hearing the words ". . .and gave thanks. . .").*

God is with us. Therefore, let us pray together in thanksgiving.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal:  
you we praise and glorify, you we worship and adore.  
You formed the earth from chaos; you encircled the globe with air;  
you created fire for warmth and light; you nourish the lands with water.  
You molded us in your image, and with mercy higher than the mountains,  
with grace deeper than the seas, you blessed the Israelites  
and cherished them as your own.

And also that we, estranged and dying,  
might be adopted to live in your Spirit,  
you called to us through the life and death of Jesus.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread,  
(*raise the bread,*) and gave thanks (+); broke it,  
and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, (*raise the cup/s*),  
gave thanks (+), and gave it for all to drink, saying:  
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Together as the body of Christ, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes:  
**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

With this bread and cup we remember your Son,  
the first-born of your new creation.  
We remember his life lived for others, and his death and resurrection,  
which renews the face of the earth. We await his coming,  
when, with the world made perfect through your wisdom,  
all our sins and sorrows will be no more. **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Holy God, holy and merciful one, holy and compassionate,  
send upon us and this meal your Holy Spirit,  
whose breath revives us for life, whose fire rouses us to love.

Enfold in your arms all who share this holy food.  
Nurture in us the fruits of the Spirit, that we may be a living tree,  
sharing your bounty with all the world. **Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.**

Holy and benevolent God, receive our praise and petitions,  
as Jesus received the cry of the needy, and fill us with your blessing,  
until, needy no longer and bound to you in love,  
we feast forever in the triumph of the Lamb:  
through whom all glory and honour is yours, O God, O Living One,  
with the Holy Spirit, in your holy church, now and forever. **Amen.**

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.

*The bread and wine are shared using the words appropriate to each:  
The body of Christ, the Bread of Life/the Bread from Heaven/Bread for the world.  
The blood of Christ/the Life of Christ/the Cup of Salvation*

## SENDING

### Prayer after the Meal

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace:  
your word has been fulfilled.  
My own eyes have seen the salvation  
which you have prepared  
in the sight of every people:  
a light to reveal you to the nations  
and the glory of your people Israel.

### Benediction (Blessing)

May God bless us and keep us. May God's face shine upon us  
and be gracious to us. May God look upon us with favour  
and give us peace. Amen.

### Sending Song #760 "O Christ the Same"

1. O Christ the same, through all our story's pages,  
our lives and hopes, our failures and our fears;  
eternal Lord, the king of all the ages,  
unchanging still amid the passing years.

O living Word, the source of all creation,  
who spread the skies, and set the stars ablaze,  
O Christ the same, who wrought our whole salvation,  
we bring our thanks for all our yesterdays.

2. O Christ the same, the friend of sinners, sharing  
our inmost thought, the secrets none can hide,  
still as of old upon your body bearing  
the marks of love, in triumph glorified.

O Son of Man, who stooped for us from heaven,  
O Prince of life, in all your saving pow'r.  
O Christ the same, to whom our hearts are given,  
we bring our thanks for this the present hour.

3. O Christ the same, secure within whose keeping  
our lives and loves, our days and year remain,  
our work and rest, our waking and our sleeping,  
our calm and storm, our pleasure and our pain:

O Lord of love, for all our joys and sorrows,  
for all our hopes, when earth shall fade and flee,  
O Christ the same, beyond our brief tomorrows,  
we bring our thanks for all that is to be.

**Dismissal**

God has called us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,  
to journey by paths as yet untrodden, to pass through perils unknown.  
God gives us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go,  
but only that God's hand is leading us and God's love is supporting us.  
So we are at peace and we go in peace.