

**Readings and Collect for Easter 5 (C) – St James' Cambridge**  
**The Revd Deborah Ford - 24.4.16**

**Lectionary Texts: Genesis 22:1-18**

**Psalm 148**

**Acts 11:1-18**

**John 13:31-35**

**“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens...Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever...Mountains and hills... Kings and all peoples...Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.” (Psalm 148)**

- What wonderful words of encouragement from the psalm on the day when we meet to celebrate God’s living, self-giving love in bread and wine together before our Annual Parochial Church Meeting.
- It’s the occasion on which we *look back* and ‘take stock’ of the past year formally (with reports about many dimensions of the life of the church), and also *look ahead* (with the election of various new representatives and approval of our budget - a financial expression of our priorities as we look to the future).
- What a rich year, it’s been! Hasn’t it? A year ago, we were anticipating having to say farewell to Jutta, in gratitude and celebration of the many ways she had encouraged, nurtured and built up the life of St James during her time here... and the beginning of a period of interregnum and time of transition.
- At the same time, we were planning for the celebrations of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St James... ‘Beating the Bounds’ of the parish together and reminding ourselves of the wider community of which we, here, are a part -both in space and in time.
- In the months since, many, many people have taken their part in keeping God’s life in us growing – both within and without – with many, many little acts of loving service

– often very hidden and ‘behind the scenes’. I’ve been simply overwhelmed at the amount of things that happen and need to be done – let alone the patient, gracious and generous way people have offered and given of themselves so that they can be fulfilled.

- A year ago, it all felt pretty daunting... and for sure it has sometimes been very stretching – for lots of people here. But it’s also been *exciting*, hasn’t it? To have to keep trusting that God will give us the grace we need – and to discover that God *has and does* – again and again. God has been incredibly faithful and *good*: we even now know who our new incumbent is going to be! We have *so much* to celebrate and be thankful for.
- But today’s readings challenge us not to become complacent or too certain or rigid about how *we* want to do things.
- Just think of Abraham, who, having waited and trusted God’s promise that he and Sarah would have children against all the odds, is tested about who and what he really puts first... his longed-for son, Isaac, or God. As with many parents, I would imagine he would have found it much easier to give up his own life, rather than that of his precious child.
- Then Peter, in the reading from Acts, who’s being judged about why on earth he’s been breaking the Jewish food laws through eating with gentiles... Something that (for the Israelites) has been completely forbidden by God and makes him socially and ritually unclean.
- Then Jesus, talking to his disciples, just after he’s washed their feet and taken on the role of a servant: “Love one another, as I have loved you.” *That’s* how people are going to recognise who I am.
- Each reading is about how prepared we are to stay *open* to God and how much we’re prepared to *risk and trust* God... even if it means being called to do things in ways that we can’t yet imagine – or don’t think we want or will be good.

- And they are still very ‘live’ issues in our world today: conflicts between different churches and religions; social, racial and gender inequalities; economic exploitation... and so on. I’m sure they’re all happening within St James’ parish – just as they are in our workplaces and wider society– however subtly.
- One of the dangers in a time of uncertainty and change is that we become clingy – like Mary, when Jesus meets and surprises her in the garden after his resurrection... and we cling on to things for plenty of other reasons, too. Systems and organisations are often very good at justifying themselves and their own ‘preferred’ or ‘usual’ ways of doing things.
- But Jesus is always saying ‘Let me be *bigger!*’ Let me do more than you can *begin* to imagine! Be open to being surprised and *delighted!*
- “See, I am making all things new! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end...” (Revelation 21: 5-6 – an alternative reading for today)
- That’s the work and power of God’s Spirit that brings creation out of nothingness; light out of dark; life out of death. Again and again... every moment of every day. God’s Word and Law is *living and dynamic*: that’s what the psalm is about.
- The invitation and challenge is: how do we keep ourselves *open*?
- It was unimaginable for Abraham that he was being asked to have to even contemplate giving up his son, but that’s what God was asking, and, in his willingness to dare to trust God, he was given *life*.
- It was unimaginable for Peter that he was being asked to let go of the ways the Jewish community had always done things... but he did.... After all, as he said:
- “*Who was I that I could hinder God?*”(Acts 11:17)

- I wonder was it also unimaginable for Jesus, as he grappled with his Father, in Gethsemane, that he was being called to give up his life? Yet he, too, was able to say: ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’ (Luke 22:42).
- I wonder what is unimaginable for us? And what fears lurk behind it?
- Are we really open to loving and serving others as Jesus calls us to? Even if it means being changed by them?
- I wonder what it might mean for us as a parish? And what we might be in danger of missing and/or hindering if we don’t?
- So let’s offer ourselves and the life of St James afresh into God’s life-giving hands as we pray:

Risen Christ,  
 your wounds declare your love for the world  
 and the wonder of your risen life:  
 give us compassion and courage  
 to risk ourselves for those we serve,  
 to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.** (Collect for Easter 5)

**Or:**

**Prayer:**

O fire of the comforting Spirit,  
 Life of the life of all creation  
 You are holy in quickening all kind:

Rise inside us like a rushing wind...  
 Blow through us, refreshing our tired places  
 Leap within us like a revolutionary fire...

Surge through us in released creativity

Flow through us through our world as life-giving breath

Disturber of our equanimity... Come!

Challenger of our pre-conceived ideas and prejudices... Come!

Truth-teller speaking in us... Come!

Breaker down of boundaries, who will send us out to stand on wild

headlands of the Spirit, farther and more dangerous than we have ever

gone... Come!

Be it done unto me [and us] according to thy Word. **Amen.**

### **Genesis 22:1-18 ‘The Command to Sacrifice Isaac’**

22After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’<sup>2</sup>He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.’<sup>3</sup>So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.<sup>4</sup>On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.<sup>5</sup>Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.’<sup>6</sup>Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.<sup>7</sup>Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘Father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ He said, ‘The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’<sup>8</sup>Abraham said, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.’ So the two of them walked on together.

9 When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.<sup>10</sup> Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.<sup>11</sup> But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’<sup>12</sup> He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.’<sup>13</sup> And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son.<sup>14</sup> So Abraham called that place ‘The Lord will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.’

15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven,<sup>16</sup> and said, ‘By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son,<sup>17</sup> I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies,<sup>18</sup> and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.’

### **Psalm 148 ‘Praise for God’s Universal Glory’**

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;

praise him in the heights!

<sup>2</sup> Praise him, all his angels;

praise him, all his host!

<sup>3</sup> Praise him, sun and moon;

praise him, all you shining stars!

- <sup>4</sup> Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!
- <sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for he commanded and they were created.
- <sup>6</sup> He established them for ever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.
- <sup>7</sup> Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,  
<sup>8</sup> fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!
- <sup>9</sup> Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!
- <sup>10</sup> Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!
- <sup>11</sup> Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!
- <sup>12</sup> Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!
- <sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.
- <sup>14</sup> He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,

for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the LORD!

### **Acts 11:1-18 ‘Peter’s Report to the Church at Jerusalem’**

11 Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God.<sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him,<sup>3</sup> saying, ‘Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?’<sup>4</sup> Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying,<sup>5</sup> ‘I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me.<sup>6</sup> As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air.<sup>7</sup> I also heard a voice saying to me, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.”<sup>8</sup> But I replied, “By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.”<sup>9</sup> But a second time the voice answered from heaven, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”<sup>10</sup> This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven.<sup>11</sup> At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were.<sup>12</sup> The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.<sup>13</sup> He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, “Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter;<sup>14</sup> he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.”<sup>15</sup> And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning.<sup>16</sup> And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?’<sup>18</sup> When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, ‘Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.’



**John 13:31-35 'The New Commandment'**

31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.<sup>32</sup>If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.<sup>33</sup>Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come."<sup>34</sup>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.<sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

**Post-Communion Prayer:**

Eternal God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:  
grant us to walk in his way,  
to rejoice in his truth,  
and to share his risen life;  
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen.**