

July 26, 2020  
Genesis 23:1-20; 25:7-11

Worship at home  
Walking with Abraham along the way of Jesus

**Call to Worship:** Psalm 27:1, 13, 14

**Opening prayers:**<sup>1</sup>

God of the past, present and future,  
we marvel at the wonder of your creation.  
We praise you for the blessings of this season, for gardens growing, birds singing,  
shouts of joy in times of play and restful evening sunsets.  
Such good gifts all around us remind us of your faithfulness to us.  
You promise us a life beyond anything we can hope or imagine,  
a kingdom marked by grace, love and justice for all.  
In Jesus' name, by the power of the Spirit breathing within us,  
We praise you for your loving kindness and the hope it brings to us day by day.

As we consider your faithfulness to us,  
we cannot but help think about the ways we have not lived faithfully.  
So, we confess that we feel more comfortable with the way things are,  
rather than live out the challenges we meet in Jesus.  
Tempted by the promises of our culture,  
we rely on the status quo to protect and prosper some but not all.  
Turning away from the cries of the hurting,  
we fail to stand up for the justice they seek.  
Afraid to speak of our faith and hope in you,  
we remain silent and complacent.  
Forgive us all the ways we let you down.  
Amen.

**Assurance:**

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn us? Only Christ—  
And Christ died for us; Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us.  
Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and set free by  
God's generous grace. Thanks be to God!

**Hymn #349** "My hope is built on nothing less" (lyrics only)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcUzHyOhIdw>

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<sup>1</sup> worship resource for July 26, 2020 from <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

### **The Word of God read and interpreted:**

This is the final sermon in our series “Walking with Abraham along the way of Jesus.”

In order to place this reading in its context, there are a number of details we need to know:

First, remember that the city of Hebron is known elsewhere in Abraham’s story as the place near to which are the Oaks of Mamre. It was here that, among other noteworthy events, the Lord promised Sarah and delivered on the promise of a son, Isaac.

Second, we will read of a people-group called the Hittites. The Hittites were descendants of a man named Heth who was a son of Canaan (from whom the territory of Canaan got its name), who was a son of Ham, who was a son of Noah. The Hittites were thus considered to be the native residents of this particular region of Canaan. They were the people of the land.

Thirdly, Abraham and Sarah have been living in Canaan for quite some time. They had lived sometimes in particular places throughout Canaan for several years at a time. Always in tents. They had yet to settle.

And finally, in what we are about to read are three events: first Sarah dies, then Abraham negotiates a land deal with the Hittites, and thirdly Abraham dies.

READ GENESIS 23:1-20; 25:7-11.

1. Just in case the author didn’t drive the point home deeply enough, Abraham legally purchased land from its Hittite owner in the presence of Hittite witnesses. Money was transferred. The amount was agreed upon in the presence of witnesses and it was weighed out according to the current valuation of the Hittite merchants. This transfer of land was not a gift. As much as Ephron son of Zohar would have been happy with a handshake, Abraham wanted everyone to know that this plot of land was now the possession of Abraham’s family. That word appears three times in the narrative. The land passed from the Hittites into Abraham’s possession as a burying place.

By buying this land Abraham has proclaimed the beginning of the fulfillment of the Lord’s promises. Ephron’s field will become the geographical anchor for Abraham’s descendants. Generations from now a grandfather will walk with his grandson through the trees and past the cave of Machpelah and tell the story of how they came to be living in this land. He

will tell the story of testing and sacrifice; of faith and prayer; of obedience, disobedience, and return; of divine promises and human patience; of a dark night, a smoking pot, a flaming torch, halved animals, and a covenant. He will tell the story of a God-given pregnancy. He will tell the story of Abraham; of the father of faith; of the man whom the Lord reckoned righteous because he believed. He will tell the story of a life lived on the way sent by the Living God.

In the midst of this strange land, Abraham's family now had an anchor. Wherever they would find themselves in the years and generations to follow, God's People now had a home. They had a place to bury their dead.

2. On Martin Grove Road in Etobicoke, on the west end of Toronto is a park. The west side of the park is bordered by the road, surrounding the other sides are multi-story condominiums and apartment buildings. If you were to look out of the window of one of these apartments you would see a welcoming green lawn with playground equipment and strategically planted trees. You would also see, in the middle of the manicured lawn, a square of overgrown hawthorn bushes and far-from-strategically-planted crab apple trees. If you were to look a little closer you would see a tall fence surrounding these bushes and a padlocked gate. If you were to look through the weeds that are woven through the fence you would see, under the crab apple trees and hawthorn bushes, the remains of headstones. Fallen over, broken, decayed, these stones are so worn by weather and vandalism that you can barely read the lettering carved on their faces. But, if you take the time to decipher the marks, or find someone in the know, you would learn that this unkempt square in the middle of a manicured park in Etobicoke is what remains of the Stonehouse family burial ground.

A little further south and east is the intersection of what is now called Eglington Avenue and Kipling Avenue. At the north-eastern corner of this intersection are luxury townhouses. At the north-western corner are apartment buildings. Between the apartment buildings and the street is a small patch of beautiful mature oak and maple trees. This patch of trees is all that remains of what some people refer to affectionately as "Grandpa Canning's bush."

The Stonehouse and Canning families settled in this part of Ontario in the early 1800s and late 1700s. They were strangers in a strange land. In the course of time a Stonehouse man met and married a Canning woman. They gave birth to a daughter. She married a man with the

last name Graydon. They had a son who had a son who had a daughter. She married a young man with the last name Marnoch. And they gave birth to me and my siblings.

Although there have been times when I have tried to ignore it, whenever I visit this part of Etobicoke and walk along Martin Grove Road or Eglinton Avenue a long-buried part of my soul feels content. As the street cars rush by and the horns honk, I feel, inexplicably, a little bit of peace.

Even if you don't live nearby, knowing where your loved ones and your ancestors are buried has a powerfully grounding effect on your soul.

**3.** It's interesting that Abraham sought to bury Sarah "out of my sight." I don't think this suggests Abraham didn't love her and wanted to forget her. He wept when she died. He bought land in which to bury her. However, Abraham had a very grounded understanding of death and the hope of faith.

Sarah died. He mourned. He buried her body.

Abraham died. His sons mourned. They buried his body.

The phrase "gathered to his people" isn't a euphemism for being reunited with loved ones in a non-physical plane in some other world. It simply refers to the Israelite practice of using ancestral burial plots. The body of the deceased was laid in the cave with the bones of those who had previously died.

Abraham and Sarah's faith were fixed not on being separated from one's body and leaving this earth when you die, nor on being reunited in some ethereal way in another plane, but rather on the future day when heaven becomes manifest on earth. When God's people do righteousness and justice according to the Word of God in the presence of friend and foe alike. When all nations will see the glory of God. Their faith was fixed on the promises of God being fulfilled in the earthly world God created and called Good.

This is what I find to be so powerful about Christian hope. Jesus was resurrected from the dead. He wasn't a spirit without a body. He wasn't a ghost. He's not an idea or a philosophy. He walked and talked and ate with his disciples. Jesus' resurrection is the sign that God is redeeming his good, physical, earthy world. Jesus embodies all the hopes of Abraham and everyone to come after him. Jesus embodies heaven on earth.

4. By the light of faith, I know that it doesn't matter where my ancestors are buried, or where I am buried. Every square inch of creation belongs to the triune God and has been redeemed through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

Christian hope is not fixed on leaving this earth when we die. It's fixed on resurrection. It's fixed on the return of God's glory to God's world. It's on redeeming what God has called good.

The Holy Spirit breathed into the souls of his disciples inspires us to testify to this redemption and to reveal the glory of God as we walk along the way Jesus sends us from sunup to sundown. Wherever and with whomever we live.

This daily walk requires faith. Faith that is refined and purified in tests along the way. Faith that encourages us to turn toward the struggles, trusting in the Word of God and God's providence. Faith by which we learn to recognize God's presence in our midst despite circumstances. Faith that inspires us to trust God's word, listen for his voice in the scriptures and courageously respond in obedience.

Faith enables us to face the challenges of the moment, to face even our own mortality, without fear. Faith enables us to do God's righteousness and justice with the assurance that one day, when Christ returns and the dead are raised incorruptible, we shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Walking from sunup to sundown in such faith, we become channels divine blessing for our neighbours, families, and friends.

To God be the glory now and forever.

Amen.

**Hymn #478 "To Abraham and Sarah"**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWZrKoj3sVE>

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:<sup>2</sup>**

Good and generous God,  
In Jesus Christ you came to us, promising us life in abundance.  
We give you thanks today for the abundant gifts we receive in him:  
    Assurance of your love day by day;  
    Relief of mercy when we recognize our own failings;  
    Hope renewed when things seem bleak;

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<sup>2</sup> worship resource for July 26, 2020 from <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

Peace that comes when we trust ourselves to your eternal keeping.  
These are the gifts that matter, O God, so for all the times we experience these gifts we thank you in these moments of silence:

*(Keep silence for at least 10 seconds)*

Generous God, the world is going through difficult times this summer.  
So we pray for all whose lives seem empty of joy:

Because plans have changed, and friends seem far away.

Because hearts are filled with disappointment and loneliness.

Because sorrow and grief rise up each day.

Support each one we name in this silence with your abundant compassion:

*(Keep silence for at least 10 seconds)*

Generous God, so many things must be rearranged because of the pandemic and what it has revealed.

We pray for those whose lives are empty of purpose,  
and for those who do not know the respect of their neighbours:

Because they are without work.

Because they face discrimination and are devalued in our communities.

Because they have made poor choices and cannot find a way forward.

Support each one we name in this silence with your abundant mercy and show them signs of hope:

*(Keep silence for at least 10 seconds)*

Generous God,

We remember before you in silence those whose lives are empty of peace and hope:

Because they struggle with illness or disability.

Because they are powerless in the face of violence.

Because old animosities rankle and opportunities for reconciliation are elusive.

*(Keep silence for at least 10 seconds)*

Send your dove of peace and promise to create new possibilities for each one.

Good and generous God, fill us with the energy and compassion of your Spirit to reach out to those facing difficult times. May we become the gift we have received in Jesus for it is in his name we pray, saying...

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Benediction:**

As you walk through your day,  
may God go before you to lead you,

behind you to protect you,

beneath you to support you,

beside you to befriend you.

Do not be afraid.

May the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon you.  
Do not be afraid.  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
Amen.