



Wesley Wellington

**75 Taranaki Street**  
[www.wesleychurch.org.nz](http://www.wesleychurch.org.nz)

**Sunday 13 March 2022    Lent 2**

***Haere mai ki tēnei Whare Karakia***  
***Welcome to this House of Prayer***



10am Congregation  
Service

10am 13 March 2022

In the Church  
75 Taranaki Street  
Wellington

*"Our many-layered faith"*

**We are a multi-racial Christian community:**  
**Methodist in affiliation – Ecumenical in intention**  
**Diverse in theology – Inclusive in outreach.**

**Kia ora koutou katoa — Talofa Lava**  
**Malo e lelei — Bula Vinaka Greetings to you all!**

**Order of Service**  
**10am Congregation**  
**Wesley Methodist Church 75 Taranaki Street**  
**13 March 2022    Lent 2**

Leader: **Lay Preacher – Philip Garside**  
Organ: **Colin Scarf**      Guitar: **Heather Garside**

**Welcome & Introduction**

- Welcome
- Fire
- Earthquake
- Children.
- This is the 2nd Sunday of Lent, the church season when we prepare for Holy Week and Easter.
- One of the lectionary readings for today is about the Transfiguration, when Jesus appeared on the mountain with Elijah and Moses. We won't be focussing on that reading in this service, but you can find it in Luke chapter 9.
- We will explore a reading from Genesis about God promising Abram many children, and a Psalm of David offering praise to God and asking for direction.
- The theme of the service is Our many-layered faith.

**Call to Worship**

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord,  
when I will make a new covenant.

**The new covenant of God is written on our hearts.**

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord,  
when I shall be your God and you shall be my people.

**The new covenant of God is written on our hearts.**

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord,  
when all people shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

**The new covenant of God is written on our hearts.**

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord,  
when I will remember your sin no more.

**Thanks be to God. Let us now worship.**

**Lighting the Candles**

As we light these candles:

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God  
**and let your *light* shine through**

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God  
**and let your *justice* shine through**

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God  
**and let your *hope* shine through**

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God  
**and let your *peace* shine through**

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God  
**and let your *love* shine through. Amen.**

### Opening Prayer

**Holy God, we give you thanks and praise  
for the ways that you make your presence known among us  
and for your covenant in which we live;**

for the gift of creation,  
whose beauty surprises us season in and season out;

**for our Jewish forebears in faith,  
who became your people, showing the world  
what it means to live in relationship with you;**

for Jesus Christ,  
through whom your covenant of mercy and grace  
became open to each of us;

**for your Holy Spirit,  
which fills us with your power and sends us out  
to preach the good news in word and deed;**

and for the gift of this congregation,  
which enables us to live out our ministry in our time and place.

**For these and all your gifts,  
we give you thanks and lift up our voices  
in Jesus' name. Amen.**

### Hymn: Tell Out my Soul H&P 86.

Words: Timothy Dudley-Smith. Music: Walter Greatorex.

1. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;

tender to me the promise of his word;  
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his Name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;  
his mercy sure, from age to age to same;  
his holy Name - the Lord, the Mighty One.
3. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.  
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.
4. Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
to children's children and for evermore!

### **Prayer of Approach**

Ever-Abundant God, we open our hearts to you this day,  
and offer these truths:

**Today we live in the fear that encompasses us.**

**Today we live with the prejudice  
that is right in front of us.**

**Today we live with the ignorance that dwells within us.**

**Today we live with the doubt that holds us back.**

**Help us, we pray,  
that we will find courage in unlikely places,  
discover the world with new and gracious understandings,  
move to those places where love is needed,  
and have faith that you are with us.**

**This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.**

### ***Words of Assurance***

Friends, hear the good news that God listens to our prayers,  
understands our concerns, and holds us close  
in this time of confession and truth telling.

Know today that we have been given the grace and the courage  
to go into the world and spread this good news. **Amen.**

*[Silence]*

### **Story Time**

**Props:** 3 large unions, big knife, 2 smaller sharp knives, chopping board, large towel to cover small table, basin, soap, small towel, hand sanitiser, 4 disposal takeaway food containers with lids.

Ask children to front (need 2 to 3, so ask for adults to come forward if necessary).

Slice in to top of onions for children, but not right off. Cut 4 vertical scores a few layers thick in these onions. Give the onions back to the children.

Cut top of my onion, and from the top make two vertical cuts from top to near the bottom of the onion in a cross shape.

Ask children to hold up onions and say that they are complete and whole, and represent a surface look at us all being gathered here today.

Ask the children to peel the thin brown skin from their onions. This will be tricky and take effort.

When the skins are off all the onions, say that we have now gone one layer deeper. We **find here the things we do in our worship services.**

Ask children to peel back one quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see the **music we sing and listen to in church.**

Ask the children to peel back one quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see the **Bible readings we hear in church.**

Ask the children to peel back one quarter panel of this layer and say we can now **see the banners and hangings in our church.**

Ask the children to peel back the last quarter panel of this layer and say we can now **see the prayers we pray in church.**

Leader also peels the quarter panels with the children.

Everyone holds up their onions for the congregation to see.

Say that we are now ready to go one layer deeper.

Ask children to peel back one quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see the **offerings of money, time and energy that people make to the church.**

Ask the children to peel back one quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see the **greetings and welcome we offer people when they come in our front door.**

Ask the children to peel back one quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see the **good sermons and story times that worship leaders present in our church.**

Ask the children to peel back the last quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see the **hospitality and time for sharing that we have in our morning teas after our service.**

Leader also peels the quarter panels with the children.

Everyone holds up their onions for the congregation to see.

Ask children if they can imagine what we will see when we peel back the next layer?

Ask children to peel back one quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see **our memories of the people who were faithful members of our church who have died.**

Ask the children to peel back one quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see how **the Bible stories we first hear as children are an important as we get older, and our faith develops.**

Ask the children to peel back one quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see that **our church is connected by the Spirit with all the other people in the world are worshipping today.**

Ask the children to peel back the last quarter panel of this layer and say we can now see **the love of God as shown in all the stories about Jesus that we hear and remember.**

Stop peeling at this point.

Ask children to put their onions in the plastic containers and take them home to add as an ingredient when they are cooking a meal.

Get children to wash hands and return to pews. Was own hands.

Leader's onion should still have several unpeeled layers. Put this onion in the pulpit with a towel underneath ready of the sermon.

**Song: 10am Singing Group: Let there be peace on earth**

1. Let there be peace on earth  
And let it begin with me:  
Let there be peace on earth,  
The peace that was meant to be.  
With God always with us  
Family all are we.  
Let us walk together  
In perfect harmony.
2. Let peace begin with me,  
Let this be the moment now.  
With every step I take,  
Let this be my solemn vow:  
To take each moment  
and live each moment  
In peace eternally.  
Let there be peace on earth  
and let it begin with me.

## Readings

### **Genesis 15:1-12** *The Message*

After all these things, this word of GOD came to Abram in a vision: “Don’t be afraid, Abram. I’m your shield. Your reward will be grand!”

Abram said, “GOD, Master, what use are your gifts as long as I’m childless and Eliezer of Damascus is going to inherit everything?” Abram continued, “See, you’ve given me no children, and now a mere house servant is going to get it all.”

Then GOD’s Message came: “Don’t worry, he won’t be your heir; a son from your body will be your heir.”

Then he took him outside and said, “Look at the sky. Count the stars. Can you do it? Count your descendants! You’re going to have a big family, Abram!”

And he believed! Believed GOD! God declared him “Set-Right-with-God.”

GOD continued, “I’m the same GOD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldees and gave you this land to own.”

Abram said, “Master GOD, how am I to know this, that it will all be mine?”

GOD said, “Bring me a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old, and a dove and a young pigeon.”

He brought all these animals to him, split them down the middle, and laid the halves opposite each other. But he didn’t split the birds. Vultures swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram scared them off. As the sun went down a deep sleep overcame Abram and then a sense of dread, dark and heavy.

When the sun was down and it was dark, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch moved between the split carcasses. That’s when GOD made a covenant with Abram: “I’m giving this land to your children, from the Nile River in Egypt to the River Euphrates in Assyria—the country of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaim, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

### **Psalms 27** *The Message [Adapted]*

Light, space, zest—  
that’s God!

So, with God on my side I’m fearless,  
afraid of no one and nothing.

When vandal hordes ride down  
ready to eat me alive,

Those bullies and toughs  
fall flat on their faces.

When besieged,  
I'm calm as a baby.

When all hell breaks loose,  
I'm collected and cool.

I'm asking God for one thing,  
only one thing:

To live with God in God's house  
my whole life long.

I'll contemplate God's beauty;  
I'll study at his feet.

That's the only quiet, secure place  
in a noisy world,

The perfect getaway,  
far from the buzz of traffic.

God holds me head and shoulders  
above all who try to pull me down.

I'm headed for God's place to offer anthems  
that will raise the roof!

Already I'm singing God-songs;  
I'm making music to God.

Listen, God, I'm calling at the top of my lungs:  
"Be good to me! Answer me!"

When my heart whispered, "Seek God,"  
my whole being replied,

"I'm seeking God!"  
Don't hide from me now!

You've always been right there for me;  
don't turn your back on me now.

Don't throw me out, don't abandon me;  
you've always kept the door open.

My father and mother walked out and left me,  
but God took me in.

Point me down your highway, God;  
direct me along a well-lighted street;  
show my enemies whose side you're on.

Don't throw me to the dogs,  
those liars who are out to get me,  
filling the air with their threats.

I'm sure now I'll see God's goodness  
in the exuberant earth.

Stay with God!  
Take heart. Don't quit.

I'll say it again:  
Stay with God.

## **Sermon: Our many-layered faith**

“Then he took him outside and said, “Look at the sky. Count the stars. Can you do it? Count your descendants! You’re going to have a big family, Abram!”

And he believed! Believed GOD! God declared him “Set-Right-with-God.”

I have titled this sermon, **Our many-layered faith, Our many-layered faith.**

Let’s pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable to you, O God, our strength, and our liberator. Amen.

I really like onions. We chop them up, brown them in a pot or frying pan and add them to curries, soups, bolognese and with sausages. My favourite way to eat them is to roast them whole in the oven with chicken or other meat. The onions soften and pick up the other flavours. Yum.

As we saw earlier, onions have a thin skin and many layers. It seems to me that onions offer a metaphor for how our faith develops and deepens as we become mature Christians.

Here’s a summary of my faith journey so far.

My father was a Methodist minister so I’m a PK [Preacher’s Kid]. In my early years we lived in Christchurch, Silverdale, the Solomon Islands, Whangaparaoa and Cannons Creek. In my teenage years in Elsdon and flatting as a young adult in Wellington I had nothing to do with the church. Then I joined Drama Christi, met and married Heather, and started attending this church. I was part of the 10am young adults group here, and part of the combined group with young adults from our other congregations. I joined the choir under Malcolm Rickard and was confirmed.

My faith was fairly standard and followed the same exploring of layers as we did with the children, up to the point where I believed

(and still do), that the love of God is shown in all the stories about Jesus that we hear and remember.

[ \* \* \* \* \* ]

Then about 20 years ago I began to ask myself questions about the stories in the Bible, especially the miracles of Jesus. The more I thought about this and the more I started reading theology books by John Dominic Crossan, Bob Funk and others like them, the more questions I had. I came to the conclusion that most of the miracles of Jesus probably didn't happen in the way they are described in our Bibles. I was peeling another layer off the onion. [Do this] What was next?

I then became curious about how the stories about Jesus came to be recorded in the Bible and learned that the Gospels were written 40 to 70 years after Jesus died and not by disciples or eye witnesses of Jesus. So stories about Jesus were kept alive by word of mouth until the writer of Mark wrote the first gospel in about the year 70, just after the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. And what if the stories were not passed on correctly? Perhaps we don't even have the actual words that Jesus spoke. Another layer is peeled off.

And then I looked at the nativity stories in Luke and Matthew. They are very different. Because the Jewish tradition was that the messiah would be born in Bethlehem, Luke says that Mary and Joseph travelled from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem just before Jesus was born. (Matthew's gospel assumes that they already lived in Bethlehem). And that the reason for returning to Bethlehem, Joseph's home town perhaps, was that the Romans demanded people return to their home town to be counted in an empire-wide census. Historically, there was no such census and no instruction to return to home towns.

And the idea that Mary was a virgin is most likely a mis-translation by Matthew and Luke of an Old Testament prophecy about a young woman, which contains no reference to whether or not she was a virgin.

So I peel another layer off and dig deeper.

What if the crucifixion and resurrection didn't happen as they are described in the Gospels, which all tell somewhat different stories anyway? Was Jesus really divine?

Another layer gone. Then another, and pretty soon there is nothing left.

[ \* \* \* \* \* ]

The logical conclusion of this critical phase of faith is that Jesus was a good rabbi but not in any way divine, any more than you or I are divine. Maybe God doesn't exist either? Maybe the stories in the Bible are just that – made up stories.

If that is where my theology and faith journey stopped, I wouldn't be here in the pulpit today. To do so would be false and hypocritical.

Yes, for me, and perhaps some of you, this sort of intellectual exploration is a useful pathway into a deeper faith and fuller ideas about Jesus and God. But my faith journey continues on. And so does yours.

I didn't stop at the crossroads. Didn't turn left or right, or do a U turn, but moved forward, I hope with new humility and wisdom. And so can you.

Some of the elements in my life that I draw strength from and have become fresh expressions of my faith, include music, serving ministers and worship leaders by providing them with resource books and other materials, publishing positive books, helping to run services here and publicising our congregation on Facebook.

We can start to build back some layers on our onions. We recognise that we are called to serve others. We recognise that as we mature, we have a chance to integrate, draw together and link, the different elements of our lives: our talents and passions, and the positive relationships we have within our family, at church and in the wider community.

We add back another layer.

[ \* \* \* \* \* ]

Phrases in our Bible readings often trigger lines of melody I have sung in pieces of music. The first line of a new piece by Jonathan Berkahn, *Look at the Stars*, immediately came to mind when I read about God telling Abram to “Look at the sky. Count the stars” in our reading this morning.

When I was reading the leader’s guide for the second session of our Lent study that Nicola will lead on Wednesday night, a line said by one of the convicted men crucified next to Jesus, brought to mind a phrase from Stainer’s *Crucifixion* oratorio that I sang years ago. Bible verses often bring to mind sections of Handel’s *Messiah* that we last sang here in 2018.

Each of these moments triggers not only an aural memory, but also a muscle memory as I remember what it felt like to perform that music.

We add back another layer.

And it is a privilege to lead this congregation in worship and to preach the good news of God’s love for us.

Let’s reflect on today’s readings. Let’s enjoy the lively paraphrases that Eugene Petersen has gifted to us in his *The Message* bible.

[ \* \* \* \* \* ]

Abram and Sarai have followed God’s extraordinary call to them to migrate from Ur, in southern Iraq, to Haran in Israel.

Abram is having second thoughts about this whole venture.

In a vision (a dream or a meditative state) at night, God reassures Abram.

“Don’t be afraid,” says God. This echoes the angels message at Jesus birth and triggers a memory of singing Jonathan’s Christmas song *Be not Afraid*.

What is Abram really worried about? He’s worried about dying childless and that one of his servants will inherit his wealth and household. “You’ve given me no children,” he laments to God.

I suspect that having the family line continue, is a back of the mind issue for us today too. In Abram’s time, three and a half to four thousand years ago, it was believed that children come from God.

Abram wonders if God deliberately chose that he and Sarai should not conceive up to now?

Abram is starting down a dangerous train of thought, asking himself, “what sort of God is this, who withholds a blessing, and has given me no children?”

We might ask, what about Sarai? This story reflects the ancient belief that children arose from the father’s semen only, and that mothers only carry the child, rather than adding their genetic material.

Don’t worry God says again. Come and look at the stars in the sky. There were no city light obscuring the night sky in Abram’s time. A clear night sky is wonderful.

God reassures Abram with a metaphor. You will have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky. This simpler idea is a way of understanding another bigger, more complex, idea.

And he believed! Abram believed that God would give him and 90 year old Sarai, children.

Notice that God declared Abram “Set-Right-with-God.” So, before this Abram was not set-right with God. Why not? What was the issue holding Abram back? Abram has courageously migrated with his household from Ur all the way to the Holy Land at God’s request. Isn’t that enough for Abram to be right with God?

Abram doesn’t quite believe that God will give him the new land he has moved to. Abram falls asleep and has a sense of dread, dark and heavy. He is still afraid.

So God makes a covenant, promises a very large block of territory to Abram’s children. The best parts of modern Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. Christians, Jews and Moslems all claim to be spiritually descended from Abraham and Sarah, so God kept this promise.

We add back another layer.

[ \* \* \* \* \* ]

Psalm 27 is exuberant. It is likely to be a Psalm written by King David.

Some phrases stand out. "...with him on my side I'm fearless,..." Here is the same theme of not being afraid that we met in the story about Abram. David is utterly confident that all enemies will be overcome.

"...all hell breaks loose," What picturesque language!

David wants, "To live with God in God's house." How does David do this? The first temple hasn't been built yet – David's son Solomon will build it later. So, does David mean a physical building? Or is living with God more of a state of mindfulness? I think that's part of it.

"...the only quiet, secure place, in a noisy world." David acknowledges a need for both quiet from the noise of everyday busyness, and somewhere physically safe where he can't be attacked, in order to devote time to worshipping God.

But is such a sanctuary an illusion. Does it really exist, for us now.

The Covid virus can get everywhere, even the Cook Islands and the Chatham Islands.

Bombs and missiles can rain down on us from just over the next hill or from thousands of kilometres away on the next continent.

The climate crisis affects everyone. The East Coast of Australia is experiencing its worst flooding ever.

We make choices in our lives. If we are worshipping God, we can't be attacking a neighbour. We have only so much time, energy and money, and can choose to use them for God's work, waste them, or worse, use them to put down and injure other people.

"When my heart whispered, "Seek God," my whole being replied,..." What is the mechanism by which God can talk and communicate with us? We need a quiet time to find God.

"...direct me along a well-lighted street;" We ask God to show us the way. God's way is in the light – the darkness of the world, and in our hearts, is pushed back. We are people of the light.

Remember the song, we sang a couple of weeks ago, “As I went down in the river to pray, Studying about that good ol' way, And who shall wear the starry crown, Good Lord, show me the way.”

[ \* \* \* \* \* ]

Let's sum up. Stay with God! Take heart. Don't quit. Abram stayed with God, even when he didn't think that his genetic line would continue, and was questioning in his heart whether the trek from Ur had been worthwhile, if one of Abram's servants was going to inherit his wealth and family.

We need to stay with God too.

It's OK to have doubts about the church and about your faith, and to peel back the layers as you dig deeper. God is big enough to cope with them.

And when we have discarded the baggage that holds us back from a relationship with God, we can put our onion back together. Some bits will be missing, and the skin won't cover it properly. It might look a bit ugly. But it will be good enough.

What's the good news in these readings? Stay with God! Take heart. Don't quit. Take the path of light not darkness. The Good News is that we have been given a clear path to follow.

Amen.

## **Song: Like a river glorious**

[Accompanied by Heather Garside – Guitar]

1. Like a river glorious, is God's perfect peace,  
Over all victorious, in its bright increase;  
Perfect, yet it floweth, fuller every day,  
Perfect, yet it groweth, deeper all the way.

*Refrain:*

Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest  
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.

2. Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,  
Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;  
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,  
Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there.
3. Every joy or trial falleth from above,  
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love;  
We may trust Him fully all for us to do.  
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.

## **Community Time**

### **Sharing the Peace**

Let's greet each other saying: **"Peace be with you."**

### **Notices**

### **Sharing Joys and Sorrows**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

To the bidding: "...God of our ancestors," please respond with: **"hear the prayers we bring today."**

## **Lord's Prayer [Sung]**

**Our Father in heaven  
holy be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins**

**as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Do not put us to the test,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

## **Offering**

(We also acknowledge offerings made by automatic payment and online banking)

**Blessing of Offering** (said together)

**They seem so little and the world is so big  
and so overwhelming right now,  
yet we offer these gifts to you, O God.  
Take what we offer and bless it for your mission of love.  
In a world of conflict and pandemic,  
may these gifts, and we ourselves,  
become agents of change and transformation,  
in Jesus' name of self-giving love. Amen**

## **Hymn: O God, Each Day You Bless Us.**

Words: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2004). Tune *Ellacombe*

1. O God, each day you bless us with gifts of your shalom:  
You give us peace and jus-tice, you welcome lost ones home.  
You care for your creation and set your people free;  
You offer us salvation and build community.
2. You make us sons and daughters baptised and reconciled!  
You show us: Each peace-maker is blest as your own child.  
You fill us at your table with strength for each new day;  
Then Spirit-filled we're able to live your peaceful way.
3. We'll worship, pray, and study, to learn new skills for peace;  
We'll work as one strong body so justice will increase.  
We'll build new global friendships, seek peace in every land,  
Protect the earth you gave us and give with outstretched hand.

## **Closing Prayer** (Said together)

**Merciful God, whenever we gloat at other's misfortune,  
whenever we place more faith in our buildings**

**and our beliefs then we do in you;  
whenever we pledge more allegiance  
to our political leaders  
and to our nation than to you and your reign  
– in all these times,  
we confess we are there as Jesus is crucified.**

**By your Spirit, save us from being bystanders,  
and make us active participants  
in his work of creating a heaven on earth,  
until that day your will is finally and fully done. Amen.**

**The Grace (Said together)**

**The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen**

**\* \* \* \* \***

Liturgy for this service was sourced from: *Gathering Lent / Easter 2021 (Year B)* – Canada; *Let Us Pray*, Janet Nelson 1999; *Kindle a Flame* – Philip Garside; *Let there be peace on earth* – Words & Music: Sy Miller & Jill Jackson – Adapted by Philip Garside (2018); Amy-Jill Levine, *Witness at the Cross: Leader's Guide*, 2021. Onions cover image: Philip Garside.

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