



**Preparation for Worship:** We Seek your Kingdom

**Watch on YouTube:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuDHUQ-4a\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuDHUQ-4a_g)

*We seek your kingdom throughout every sphere  
We long for heaven's demonstration here  
Jesus your light shine bright for all to see  
Transform, revive, and heal society*

*Before all things, in him were all things made  
Inspiring culture, media, and trade  
May all our work serve your economy  
Transform, revive, and heal society*

*Peace, truth, and justice reigning everywhere  
With us be present in our public square*

*Fill all who lead with your integrity  
Transform, revive, and heal society*

*Forgive us Lord, when we have not engaged  
Failing to scribe your heart on history's page  
Make us again what we were made to be  
Transform, revive, and heal society*

*Faithful to govern ever may we be  
Selfless in service, loving constantly  
In everything may your authority  
Transform, revive, and heal society*

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**Hymn:** StF 51 Great is thy faithfulness

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4ox4es1jo8>

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
there is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;  
as Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt 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!

Thomas O. Chisholm

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]

## Prayer

Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, We stand before you in the wake of a General Election. We pray for those to whom has been given the responsibility of governing this country but we do so looking at the bigger picture and the faith we have in you.

We give thanks and praise that ... You are the one who is over all things; You are the one who is in all things and situations; You are the one who loves this world with a passion that we can only begin to imagine.

You made this world and all that is in it. You continue to sustain it and, just as at the beginning of creation, your Spirit hovers over all things bringing your order and perfection. Your promises stand firm, ever true, and as we have sung, let them give us strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. Great is your faithfulness, O Lord.

We confess, though, that too often we haven't seen it that way. You have a perfect plan for us yet we have often ignored that and done our own thing. Sometimes the consequences of doing that haven't been too bad; Sometimes, though, we have ended up causing hurt to you, to others, and to ourselves. But always, in going our own way, we have missed out on your best for us, and what is true for us is equally true for our country and for the world. Forgive us we pray. Set our feet

back on your paths where we have gone astray. Draw us closer to yourself. And help us to live by your example of selfless love.

God of blessing, bless us to be a blessing to you and a blessing to your world.

Amen

**Hymn:** God the Uncreated One

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rswH9CSyWHk>

*God the Uncreated One  
The author of salvation  
Who wrote the laws of space and time  
And fashioned worlds to His design  
The One whom angel hosts revere  
Hung the stars like chandeliers  
Numbered every grain of sand  
Knows the heart of every man  
He is King forever  
He is King forever  
He is King forevermore*

*God our fortress and our strength  
The rock on which we can depend  
Matchless in His majesty  
His power and authority  
Unshaken by the schemes of man  
Never-changing, Great I Am  
Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall  
He is faithful through it all  
Crown Him King forever  
Crown Him King forever  
Crown Him King forevermore*

*Mighty God in mortal flesh  
Forsaken by a traitor's kiss*

*The curse of sin and centuries  
Did pierce the lowly Prince of Peace  
Oh, lifted high, the sinless man  
Crucified, the spotless Lamb  
Buried by the sons of man  
He was rescued by the Father's hand  
To reign as King forever  
Reign as King forever  
Reign as King forevermore*

*King Eternal, God of grace  
We crown You with the highest praise  
Heaven shouts and saints adore  
You're holy, holy, holy Lord!  
What joy in everlasting life  
All is love and faith is sight  
Justice rolls and praises rise  
At the name of Jesus Christ  
King of kings forever  
King of kings forever  
King of kings forevermore  
He is King of kings forever  
King of kings forever  
King of kings forevermore  
Oh, forevermore*

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**Reading:** Genesis 12 v. 1-5

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So, Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

**Message:**

This last week has taken us into July but, for the purposes of this week's service, I want to stick with the month of June. June, as it has been for the past few years, is the Methodist Church's Bible Month which this year has been focused on the book of Genesis. Our last few recorded services haven't reflected Bible Month so I thought that today I would at least spend one week looking at three separate stories from Genesis.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis could be described as pre-history. It's about the days of yore when things were different. People lived to be phenomenally old. Giants walked the earth. We have the stories of the Garden of Eden, the Flood and the Tower of Babel. That's not to say that these passages aren't important but they represent 'ye olden days'

when life was not as we know it now. It's with chapter 12 and the introduction of Abraham that we move to a different phase. Here are people whose lives begin to look like ours.

It's from Genesis 12 that I've taken our reading. Here, God promises that from Abraham's family tree will come a great nation that God will bless and through whom God will bless the whole world. The Israelites are blessed - just as we as Christians are blessed - to be a blessing to the world. God promises blessing upon Abraham; blessing upon Israel (the nation that would come from his son Isaac) and blessing upon the whole world.

It's nothing new. Already God has displayed this readiness to bless in the creation of a world that, in God's eyes, was and still is 'very good'. God displays this readiness to bless in providing clothes for Adam and Eve when they have betrayed God's trust and fallen into sin. God displays this readiness to bless in providing protection for Cain after he has become the world's first murderer; and in offering the rainbow as a pledge that there would never be another flood. Our God is a God of blessing.

I said that I wanted to focus on three stories and the first of these seems, on first reading, to run contrary to this idea of blessing. We've fast forwarded a little. God has miraculously given a child to Abraham and his wife Sarah and has said that it is through this child, Isaac, that God's earlier promises for the world will be fulfilled. But then ... and it's a huge but, God seemingly asks Abraham to kill his son.

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.*

*Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." Whattttt!*

And, without any questioning, complaining or outright refusal, Abraham meekly obeys:

*Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.*

What on earth is going on here? Not what you might think. The key lies in spotting two things. Firstly, the beginning of the story where it says that God's intention was to test Abraham and his faith. The second, is the fact that God has already PROMISED that Abraham will have many offspring THROUGH Isaac. Does God keep his promises and always remain true to his word? Yes he does. Is God a God of blessing who always seeks to build up rather than to destroy? Yes he is. There can, therefore, be no chance that Isaac will come out of this anything other than alive. I believe the reason Abraham sets out with Isaac is that he recognises this and his faith is displayed not in being prepared to kill a child but through trusting in the goodness and the faithfulness of God that will not let this happen!

The story challenges us. Are there times when we can overlook the character of God? Are there times when we can forget that God is good 'all the time' and that it is God who truly defines what love is? Are there times when we can lose sight of the faithful promises of a God who is always for us and for the creation? Might there even be times when you can be tempted to think that bad things in your life have been sent by a punishing God? In those situations, may we have the strength to trust to the goodness and the faithfulness of God.

The second story I want us to think about has to do with one of Isaac's sons, Jacob. Spoiler alert. Isaac does not die! Jacob, it turns out, is a cheat and a trickster. He is like that with his father, Isaac, and with his father-in-law, Laban. One night he has a spectacular encounter with God. The Bible story tells of him wrestling a supernatural figure until daybreak. Although Jacob is described as overcoming, it is equally clear that he is changed by the encounter, even down to God giving him a new name, the name of Israel.

Again, the story challenges us. If you and I are to be the best blessing to the world that we can be, then we need to be changed. Day by day we need to become more like Jesus or, as Paul puts it at the beginning of Romans 12, we need our minds to be renewed by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

It's a very simple fact that you cannot give away what you do not have. At the very end of his life my father-in-law developed a psychotic disorder and believed himself to be very wealthy. When we visited him at his care home, he would point to cars in the car park and tell us that we could each take one of them as a gift from him. Could we have? No! What you do not have, you cannot share. Let God gently change you. The more you have of God's love and joy and peace, the more you have to share with others. We are blessed by the God of blessing in order to be a blessing to others.

Finally, having looked at Isaac's son, Jacob, let's look at Jacob's son, Joseph. This is the favoured son with his non-existent work duties and his coat of many colours. This was the lad despised by his brothers and sold by them into slavery. This was

the man who faced false accusations and prison but who eventually ended up as second in command to the Egyptian Pharaoh. And this was the means by which God brought Jacob and the rest of Joseph's family to Egypt and saved them and the whole region from famine and starvation.

How did Joseph sum it up after he was reunited with his brothers?

*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

God intended that good should come from it.

Joseph got thrown into a pit and left to die. He was sold into slavery. He had false accusations made against him. He spent years in prison. There must have been times when he would have wondered whether life was ever going to improve again. There could easily have been times when he was tempted to think that God wasn't there, still less that God cared about him. Yet, as he looked back, he could see that the path he was on was a path that God had allowed him to be on in order that blessing might ensue. God intended it for good.

Sometimes we can get depressed as we go through dark experiences like Joseph went through. We might be tempted to think that God isn't there or does not care for us. But rest assured. I don't want to make light of any horrific things you may be facing but I do know that God promises he will always be there with you and that God is good. I pray that you may come to see that God is able to bring good things from what you are presently going through and that, as it was with Joseph, the God of blessing is able to use your experiences to bring blessing to others.

Three stories that point us towards the God of blessing who is writ large in the pages of Genesis.

- A God who is good, faithful and true, in whom our trust will always be secure;
- A God whose Spirit is at work in our lives, blessing us by making us more like Jesus, in order that we might share that with the world;
- A God who never deserts us, even in the darkest of times, and who can transform those dark experiences to become things out of which goodness and blessing can flow.

God of blessing, bless us to be a blessing to you and a blessing to your world

**Hymn:** StF 628 Faithful One

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqK-UnsRTFI>

*Faithful one, so unchanging  
Ageless one, you're my rock of peace  
Lord of all I depend on you  
I call out to you, again and again  
I call out to you, again and again*

*You are my rock in times of trouble  
You lift me up when I fall down  
All through the storm  
Your love is, the anchor  
My hope is in You alone*

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## **Prayer**

*They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ... Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14 v. 32 and 35-6)*

Lord Jesus,

As we reflect upon your story, we can see how you had to place absolute trust in the goodness and faithfulness of your Father even though, humanly speaking, every part of you was desperate to find an alternative way. You stood firm and the world was blessed.

Others meant it for harm as you were arrested and tried; beaten and crucified. Yet God intended it for good and for the saving of many lives. You stood firm and the world was blessed.

May we be ones who stand firm in our trust and obedience and so become those, too, through whom the world is blessed. Day by day may your Spirit be working within us and making us more like you so that, what we have of you, we may be able to share with others.

What we pray for ourselves we pray for Christians around the world. May your people truly be salt and light and channels through which your blessing can flood. We pray for those Christians who have been elected to Parliament and for all the ways that you can use them for the good of our national life. And we pray for those whose witness in different parts of the world is subject to hatred and persecution. May you particularly strengthen them that even in dark times they may be 'Josephs' through whom you can bring good.

As we give space to pray more generally, may we do so trusting always to the faithfulness we find in you and the love poured out towards every part of your creation. ....

Amen

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

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be your name;  
your kingdom come;  
your will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For yours is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

**Hymn:** STF 272 The Servant King

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4963QPHAIM>

*From heaven you came helpless babe  
Entered our world, your glory veiled  
Not to be served but to serve  
And give Your life that we might live*

*Chorus: This is our God, The Servant King  
He calls us now to follow Him  
To bring our lives as a daily offering  
Of worship to The Servant King*

*There in the garden of tears  
My heavy load he chose to bear  
His heart with sorrow was torn  
'Yet not My will but Yours, ' He said*

*Chorus*

*Come see His hands and His feet  
The scars that speak of sacrifice  
Hands that flung stars into space  
To cruel nails surrendered*

*Chorus*

*So let us learn how to serve  
And in our lives enthrone Him  
Each other's needs to prefer  
For it is Christ we're serving*

*Chorus*

### **In closing ...**

Let us pray for all those who are sharing in this service that the God of blessing may indeed bless us to be a blessing to himself and a blessing to his world,