



The Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit



Sunday 1st March 2026: BIG SUNDAY

Theme for today is "Justification by faith"

Join us on Zoom

Link <https://zoom.us/j/94555998672?pwd=W2fyZgVYPQjs05NaKrpVllyWJ7TfBV.1>

Passcode 646949

Opening Words:

Throughout the ages, people have gathered to worship.

Across the centuries, we have turned our praise to God on high.

Today, let us join in with this ancient tradition, and mark this Lord's day, in this place, together.

Hymn 469:

I watch the Sunrise

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PVPLoXAp_Y

I watch the sunrise lighting the sky,
Casting its shadows near.
And on this morning bright though it be,
I feel those shadows near me.

*But you are always close to me
Following all my ways.
May I be always close to you
Following all your ways, Lord.*

I watch the sunlight shine through the clouds,
Warming the earth below.
And at the mid-day, life seems to say:
I feel your brightness near me.

*For you are always close to me
Following all my ways.
May I be always close to you
Following all your ways, Lord.*

I watch the sunset fading away,
Lighting the clouds with sleep.
And as the evening closes its eyes,
I feel your presence near me.

*For you are always close to me
Following all my ways.
May I be always close to you
Following all your ways, Lord.*

I watch the moonlight guarding the night,
Waiting till morning comes.
The air is silent, earth is at rest
Only your peace is near me.

*Yes, you are always close to me
Following all my ways.
May I be always close to you
Following all your ways, Lord*

Prayers:

Rev Neil Vels

And so, Lord, as we gather this morning, we are deeply aware of you. We are aware of you when you shine brightly, and we testify to your presence. We are also aware of you, and we curse you when you seem to be defined by the shadows. Yet even when we ask where you are, we still call upon your name.

And so, we call upon your name this morning regardless of where we find ourselves: in the shadows, in the brightness of midday or waiting for morning.

As our opening worship today, we come to you honestly and acknowledge where we are asking you to reveal yourself ever more deeply to us. Gathering through Lent we remember your trial in the wilderness and how your faith was tested, we remember also the stories of your people through the ages who were called away from what they knew away from their places of comfort to follow you.

Indeed, Lord, we remember that you are always calling us to the new to leave behind the old: old places, old habits, old prejudices and to follow you on to the new where things are uncertain, untidy and undefined.

You invite us to feel the wind of your Spirit blowing into our lives upsetting our carefully ordered piles offering us new life shaping us into the people you created us to be. You come into the places of darkness shining your light on places that we prefer to keep in the darkness

Forgive us Lord for the times our stubbornness Lord!

Forgive us for resisting the Spirit

Forgive us for preferring the comfort of the old

Forgive for staying in the shadows, when you've invited us into the light

Forgive us for the times when we have defined our lives by excuses, found reasons to stay, and have resisted your grace...

Silence as we confess

As we confess, we remember the words you spoke to Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life." help us to so hear those words in our lives that we have the courage to move into the light to go when you lead and to be born again

For we pray this in your name, and with the words that you taught us:

Lord's Prayer:

Old Testament lesson: Genesis 12 1-4 read by Sue Horwell

Short reflection: Dee Moden

Genesis is a book of beginnings, journeys and challenges. Just in the first 11 chapters which it is said to span 2000 years with many life-changing events taking place. Abraham's story starts in Genesis chapter 12. Before that Abraham's father Terah along with his grandson Lot, Abraham who was his eldest son, and Abraham's wife Sarah, and many people belonging to his tribe, herdsmen, shepherds, servants and livestock, had travelled around different cities, prosperous cities with lots of opportunities and then they had settled in Haran in Southern Turkey. Abraham's father and family had worshipped other gods and idols popular in the area, but Abraham had been called by God, who he knew to be the one true God the creator of heaven and earth and worshipped only him. Abraham had built a good life in Haran for himself and his family, they were prosperous and had a good living. But then God called him to leave all this behind and travel once more and carry on to the land of Canaan. God was promising things that he and Sarah, didn't understand.

In those days it wasn't at all like today where travel is easy and people move about the world, pulling up roots and settling down somewhere else. So, it was a 'big ask' Abraham, wasn't a young man, but God had said I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you. Abraham obeyed, so once again Abraham Sarah and his nephew Lot gathered all their possessions and their workers together to start their long journey. This journey wasn't going to be easy and there were many obstacles to overcome for him and his family. Reading further into Genesis we can follow his journey. But all through this Abraham knew that God was always by his side, and he trusted in his promises.

Looking back on our own journeys maybe we too can see a pattern, often experiencing difficult times, but coming through to a better place in the end. How many times are we called to do something, when we feel settled and content, which takes us out of our comfort zone?

How do, or would we react if we were called to do something different? Sometimes we need to have different challenges, broaden our horizon because we can so easily get stuck into a rut of routine.

Have we been challenged through this time of Lent?

We always have to remember that if God calls, or challenges us, he enables, and like Abraham and Sarah we have to trust him. May we always walk in the light of the Lord. Amen

Hymn 464:

God it was who said to Abraham

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArWTCvLWp_o

God it was who said to Abraham,
"Pack your bags and travel on"
God it was who said to Sarah,
"Smile and soon you'll bear a son"
Travelling folk and aged mothers
Wandering when they thought they'd done
This is how we find God's people,
Leaving all because of one.

God it was who said to Moses,
"Save my people, part the sea"
God it was who said to Miriam,
"Sing and dance to show you're free"
Shepherds-saints and tambourinists
Doing what God knew they could
This is how we find God's people,
Liberating what they should.

God it was who said to Joseph,
"Down your tools and take your wife"
God it was who said to Mary,
"In your womb, I'll start my life!"
Carpenter and country maiden
Leaving town and trade and skills
This is how we find God's people,
Moved by what their maker wills.

Christ it was who said "Zacchaeus,
I would like to eat with you"
Christ it was who said to Martha,
"Listening's what you need to do"
Civil servants and housekeepers,
Changing places at a cost
This is how Christ summons people,
Calling both the loved and lost.

In this crowd that spans the ages,
With these saints whom we revere,
God wants us to share their purpose
Starting now and starting here.

So we celebrate our calling,
So we raise both heart and voice,
As we pray that through our living
More may find they are God's choice.

Epistle: Romans 4: 1-5, 13-17 read by Sandra Simm

Short reflection Rev Jonny Bell

Whenever we read Paul's letters, I think it is important to keep in mind the context in which they were written. For Romans, one of the Pauline letters in the New Testament that isn't disputed to be written by Paul, it is addressed to the churches in Rome and was probably written in somewhere around the years 55 or 57. Paul's letters are among the earliest texts we have from the New Testament, written decades before the Gospels.

The churches in Rome were formed of Jews and Gentiles (the 'non-Jews') and, as with many parts of the Church at the time, there were some tensions surrounding the Law and what was to be followed or not. Paul is writing to the churches in Rome, which were under Peter's leadership, likely for him to secure funding for his trip to Spain (see Romans 15). Also, Paul was a Jewish teacher and Pharisee who believed in Jesus Christ. So, we have a Jewish teacher writing to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles, offering some teaching with a hope for some money, written around 20 years after the Crucifixion. This begins to help us understand why Paul keeps referring to figures in the Hebrew Bible, like Adam and David, because many people there would know about them.

In our passage, Paul is talking, somewhat complicatedly, about Abraham, 'justification', and faith. He uses one of the Bible's significant figures, Abraham, to begin thinking about the Law in relation to Jesus Christ and the Gentiles. He does this because there was some friction in the churches in Rome between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul explains that Abraham is justified by his faith in God. This means that Abraham trusted what God was saying to him, which put him in a right relation with God. That is, he was declared to be just through God's grace. This extends to everyone through their having faith in God, whether they are Jewish or Gentile.

Indeed, Richard Hays in *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, says that Paul says that "Jews...have found Abraham to be their father not according to the flesh but according to promise." He also translated the first verse as this question: "What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?" There is an implied answer of "no", because it is not about being descended from Abraham but following his example of being justified by having faith in God. Paul is not saying that the Law is over and done with – he is Jewish and writing to a partially Jewish audience, after all. Instead, he says that the Law is confirmed through faith and through all being able to be justified by God through it. However, what does this all have to do with us nearly 2000 years later?

Well, to start with, Richard Hays says that Paul "...bears witness to the gospel in such a way that the continuity of God's grace is upheld." That is, in Jesus Christ, we are shown that the love and desire that God has for the people of Israel is also for every person in the world. It is also to say that just as Abraham was put into a right relationship with God through his faith, so too can every person be made right. This leads to God's promises that have been made to the generations before being open to any person.

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Hymn 566:

Take my life, an let it be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of4I5bTdZ8M>

Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.

Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.

Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.

Take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Intercessions:

Rev Derek Grimshaw

Generous and gracious God, we thank you for your promise to us, that you will fill us with good things, and give us hope and a future. Thank you for bringing us into a family of faith, where your faithfulness throughout the generations speaks of your goodness to us, yesterday, today and forever. God, strengthen our faith that we might trust in you, speaking a confident “yes!” to your calling on our lives.

We pray for ourselves.

God, you see my heart and know all the things that fill it – good and anxious, confident and fearful. I take a moment now to open my heart before you, holding in your safe hands the things that occupy my thoughts at the moment.

God, I pray that you would meet me in any fear I hold, helping me to trust that just as you have turned up in goodness before, to Abraham, to Paul and to the early church, you will turn up with goodness in my life.

God, I pray that I might be confident to share my own stories of faith, that in my life I will point towards the blessings you have freely offered me and speak to others of how good you are.

We pray for our church.

God, we pray for our church community gathered here in this place today. Thank you, that we are part of your family of faith, and that through the relationships we have, we can be encouraged to deepen our faith in you.

God, help us to create opportunities that together we might share our own stories of faith, that they might become encouragements to one another. Strengthen our confidence to share our testimony of faith with one another, and with the people around us. Grow our story, that we can be part of the heritage that shows your goodness through the generations.

We pray for our world.

God, we know that so many people struggle to trust that things can get better. When life is challenging, and the news brings so many stories of hopelessness, help us to work together to write a different story. In this season of Lent, help us to be people who can help bring the light of your resurrection to break into the darkness. When we encounter despair, help us to be people of hope.

God, we have been reminded of your goodness through the generations. We praise and thank you for who you are, who you have been and who you will continue to be: our gracious and generous God.

In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**

Video:

It is well with my soul

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHe_qmo3gX4

Gospel reading: John 3: 1-17 read by Beryl Flood

Short reflection: Sue Lloyd

I, like Nicodemus, may be unable to follow what Jesus is saying, but I think the most important facts from this reading are that:

God loves the world and everyone in it.

Jesus was sent by God to save us.

The Holy Spirit brings us new life.

Tempting as it is to say "Amen" and leave it there let's look a little deeper into the familiar story of Nicodemus and the main question it raises - have we really understood the message behind the story?

Nicodemus was a very religious man, one of a select few, the Pharisees who had all taken an oath to spend their whole lives observing the letter of God's law as written down by the scribes. To the Jew the Law was the most sacred thing in the whole world, the word of God to his people, and therefore if it was God's word it was perfect and complete and must relate to every aspect of a person's life.

Nicodemus was a man totally dedicated to serving God in the way that seemed right to him, to set himself apart from the world in order to keep the Law. But he was also a member of the Sanhedrin, one of 70 members of the supreme court of the Jews and one of their main roles was of examining and dealing with anyone suspected of being a false prophet.

So, was he coming to Jesus to try and trap him into saying something controversial - gathering evidence? In which case why come at night? Perhaps here was a man who realised that there was something missing in his life. He came in the dark looking for light as so many of us do. Jesus tells him that it's not external signs that are important, it's what happens inside a person's heart - and that has to be a change that can only be described as being born again. Two words which cause a lot of people to feel uncomfortable. Born again. Oh no, we're not talking "happy clappy" are we? Many commentaries argue that it's a poor translation from the Greek. What Jesus is referring to is better described as a complete change, "again", in the sense of a second time.

Jesus was trying to say to Nicodemus that there is a fundamental change that happens to anyone who experiences and enters into relationship with God. Something happens deep inside, in the heart and soul of that person, which could only be described as being reborn; and there's nothing of self in this because it comes from the grace and power of God. Just about every New Testament Epistle has the idea of rebirth in it. Poor Nicodemus doesn't seem at first reading to have understood what Jesus was on about. Here was a man who saw the need for change and wanted it, but couldn't change himself. How many times in our lives have we heard those words of Jesus and thought 'Very good, but that's a bit radical for me. I'm not that comfortable about change - I rather like me as I am thank you very much'.

Nicodemus says 'I don't understand how it works' So Jesus once again uses an everyday metaphor, in this case the wind to explain things. He tells him you may not understand the physics of what you see, but the effects are obvious. Well, it's like that with the Spirit. You may not know how it works, but the effects are plain to see in lives that have been changed.'

Jesus goes on to warn Nicodemus 'If you can't see what I'm getting at, how on earth are you ever going to understand the deeper, spiritual things?' In other words Christianity is not something that you can understand just by discussion, reading or listening to sermons - it is something that has to be experienced. We may not understand everything because at the heart of Christianity is the mystery of redemption - that God should send his Son into the world to die so that you and I might be made right again with its creator.

Nicodemus is the role model for those who want to know more about the gracious presence of God in Jesus, and the salvation that makes the world more like God intends it to be. But it's not just about Nicodemus; it's about the human longing for truth, transformation, and eternal life.

We may be glad we're not Nicodemus being put on the spot by Jesus; but during this season of Lent it might be helpful to ask ourselves what questions might Jesus ask of us as individuals and the implications for our discipleship.

Hymn 94:

To God be the glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vbGFupxwu0>

To God be the glory, great things He hath done,
so loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Refrain:

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,

let the earth hear His voice!

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,

let the people rejoice!

O come to the Father through Jesus the Son,

and give Him the glory, great things He hath done.

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God;
the vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. [Refrain]

Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath
done,

and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;

but purer, and higher, and greater will be

our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

[Refrain]

Blessing:

Go from this place, with the glory of the Lord shining all around.

Go from this place, with the Spirit of the Lord travelling ahead of you.

Go from this place, following in the light of the Christ,

In Jesus' name, go and serve the Lord.

Amen