

The Lord be with you:
and also with you.

Gracious God, as we gather here to worship you, make us thankful for your special gifts, aware of our many failings, humble to receive forgiveness, and open to the Holy Spirit who fills us with your life and love. As we celebrate the grace and good of God, we remember our sins and weaknesses.

Father God, we confess that we often take the gifts of your creation for granted, and use them chiefly to further our own interests.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Saviour Christ, we confess that we often give in to the selfish desires of our hearts, and the uncaring ways of the world.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Holy Spirit, we confess that we often close our minds to your influence, and fail to bear good fruits in our lives.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Absolution Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Genesis 21:8-21 [Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away]

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.' The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the

distance of a bowshot; for she said, 'Do not let me look on the death of the child.' And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.' Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

This is the word of the Lord;

Thanks be to God.

Matthew 10:24-39

Jesus said to his disciples, 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father,

and a daughter against her mother,

and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;

and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and

whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Those who find their life will lose it,

and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

A surface reading of today's liturgy makes me think that I wouldn't ever choose these readings for a Family Service! But the extract from Genesis does have something to tell us. Because the stories of Genesis belong to the genre of legend. Legend is originally from an oral tradition - they surely evolved over centuries. It frequently reports things that are incredible: it is poetry rather than prose, and a different sort of plausibility applies. Just as in poetry, legend aims to please, to elevate, to inspire, and to move its audience. Not to tell "what actually happened".

So, that colours and enriches my approach to this story of Ishmael's separation from the patriarchate – the "family" of Abraham. And it lays the foundation for the eventual rise of Islam, and the shared history of Islam and of the Jewish and Christian faiths. We are all from the family of Yahweh, of God the Father.

This Genesis story is clearly stating that those who do not belong to the chosen people of Israel can be sent away. But it does soften that hard stance by telling us that Ishmael eventually settled in Mecca, near the mountains of Paran. But the nub of the story of that era remains one of the exclusiveness of following the Israelite God, Yahweh.

Today's reading from Matthew's gospel focuses very much on discipleship, too. But it is about following Jesus. About learning about what his message is. But it too does have some very difficult moments, doesn't it!

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the Earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword"! Now that doesn't seem at all like our understanding of the meek and mild Jesus of Christianity, does it!?

And then there is talk of setting a man against his father. And on and on it goes.

Trying to make some sense of this is not easy – it is, to me, hard teaching.

I think the purpose is to shake us out of our comfort zone; to shake us out of complacency. It is saying that this leader Jesus is propounding a new way of living on earth. That the old ways of paganism, the old ways of Judaism, won't wash. That they won't cut it, if we want to follow Jesus' way. But why would we want to do that?

Because the heart of Jesus' teaching is that he promises something so much better than our comfortable life on earth. He promises eternal life.

If you look closely at this hard teaching, you will notice something which I missed: Jesus is not suggesting a breach between a husband and wife. The marriage relation is too precious to be threatened with division.

But he may be suggesting that when someone decides to become a disciple of his, perhaps the father won't like it, or the mother-in-law, or the son, or someone else close.

Jesus, I think, is trying to say that the family and its happiness are simply not the last word – the be-all and end-all of all existence. He is saying that discipleship has to be taken seriously – it is raising the eyes of that disciple from earthly things, to heavenly things. From things of this world to those of the next.

Take a hint from an earlier verse: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And yet, not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father!”

Our Father is in charge. The cosy comforts of this world are less important. And he is saying, cosy family cohesion at all costs is not feasible. His message is so radical that everything else becomes less important.

His message: “Do not fear those that kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.” Our Lord is lord of everything: he can destroy both body and soul.

We should remember also to read the passage in the context and perspective of family life in Jesus' time.

What if someone announced to his family that he was joining the Jesus movement: his father may have violently disagreed or even forbidden it. It might have meant that he fell out with his mother-in-law, or that a daughter would fall out with her mother.

So I think that this is a teaching against the absoluteness of the family, or of the family name or the family honour. In those days it was a radical step to take, to decide to follow this radical teacher, Jesus. They would have had to steel themselves against persecution by the authorities, the ridicule of friends or the disapproval of families.

In Judaism family splits were believed to be the final evils before the coming of the messianic King of Peace (see Micah 7) But here in Matthew it is the Messiah himself who brings these family tensions.

If I translate all of this into today's terms, today's understanding, I see the passage as meaning that being a Christian is a serious business, a serious commitment.

That it is more important than anything that is centred on the things of this world. But it doesn't mean that the family is dead – far from it. The last sentence of our reading sums up this difficult teaching rather well:

“Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it”.

Difficult. But worthwhile. Fear God, and follow the teachings of Jesus.

Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

Intercessions. As faithful disciples, let us pray to our Lord and Master for the Church, and for the world.

The Collect of the Second Sunday after Trinity

Almighty God,
you have broken the tyranny of sin
and have sent the spirit of your Son into our hearts
whereby we call you Father:
Give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,
that we, and all creation may be brought
to the glorious liberty of the children of God;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Give to the Church grace to fearlessly proclaim the words of life. Send your strength to overcome our weaknesses, so that all Christian people will overcome doubt, scorn and indifference.

We pray that the word of God will be heard in the dark places where people have not known the power of redeeming love.

Be present with those who are sick and suffering with COVID-19, and with all diseases; be with the frightened and vulnerable.

Be present to their families, and their carers. Reassure us and them that they are precious in your sight, and that you are journeying with them in their lives.

Give harmony to our families and to all who live and work in this community. We pray for the teachers in our School; for all our children, and for those preparing for Confirmation.

Reconcile those who are in dispute and mend any fractured or broken relationships, so that human love may be as a light to reveal the love of God.

We pray for those who took up their cross and followed their Master in this life, and have now passed to eternal life with him. May the light of heaven shine upon them as they rise in glory.

Rejoicing in the presence of God here among us, we pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy 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 thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever, Amen.**

Dismissal:

God grant to the living, grace;

to the departed, rest;

to the people of every church and nation, peace and concord;

and to us and all the servants of God, life everlasting.

And the blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

be with you and remain with you always, **Amen.**