

16.03.2025

Lent 2

Fear in the Wilderness

Welcome

Introduction to Theme

In this second week of the Season of Lent we continue our journey through the wilderness. Today we meet our fears face-to-face. Fear can be paralysing and can also lead us to harmful behaviour towards others. We will hear two stories that give us some advice on how to handle our fears. Abram was afraid of not having an heir who would carry on his family line. Abram trusted God and continued in prayer and faith. Jesus had people out to kill him, but he made the choice not to act out of his fear and continue to live out his ministry to people in love. What are your deepest fears in life? Let us bring those to God this day and explore how we can hold our fear and act in love.

Acknowledgement of Country

Australia

As we gather together in this time and place,
let us acknowledge the Bidjegal people of the Eora Nation
who have gathered here for thousands of years.

We pay our respects to their elders, past and present
who have listened to Country and lived in harmony with the land.

As we come together in our brokenness today,
let us acknowledge the truth of our story in this country.

Let us commit ourselves again to ongoing reconciliation between First and
Second Peoples of this land.

Lighting the Christ Candle

God is here!

God is always here!

God is with us!

God is always with us!

Saying who we are ...

We are a congregation and community ...

Who welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles,

Who create a safe place for the community, and

Who share the journey of life and faith.

Call to Worship

From Psalm 27 (NRSVUE)

The Lord is my light and my salvation,
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in this tent,
sacrifices with shouts of joy.

Let us sing and make melody to the Lord.

Sing:

“When Evenings Shorten” (Tune: ‘Cavell (A Wally wally/ Morning Hymn Street’)

**When evenings shorten and grow cool,
as grapes turn purple on the vine,
as golden grain is safely stored,
we see again our Easter sign.**

**As daisies fade along the hill,
and bush birds come to us for food,
in rain, or mist or bitter chill
we see again our Easter sign.**

**As trees grow bare, we see the trace
of life's new buds along the bough.
We do not need to wait for spring;
we see again our Easter sign.**

**So let the southern Church rejoice!
As colour flames from hill and plain
so let us sing with hearts of joy:
we see again our Easter sign. (Shirley Smith/adapted)**

Opening Prayer

Loving God,
we thank you.
We thank you;
that when we look to the stars – you are there.
that when we dive the depths of the ocean – you are there.
when we fly to the heavens, when we dig underground – you are there.
As we sit here in worship, as we lie in our beds at night – you are there.
As we enjoy delicious food or try to chase after children – you are there.
When we cry – you are there.
When we laugh – you are there.
When we despair – you are there.
When we dream – you are there.
You are there, you are there, you are here.
And we thank you.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Sing: O Christ, Lamb of God (Richard Bruxvoort Colligan)

**O Christ, Lamb of God,
sharing our weakness, our weakness,
have mercy, have mercy.**

Compassionate and loving Creator,
look with mercy on this broken and divided world;
help us to understand and forgive those
who use violence against others to destabilise, destroy and kill.

Sing: O Christ, Lamb of God

**O Christ, Lamb of God,
bearing our failings, our failings,
have mercy, have mercy.**

Take us, and use us as your seeds for peace, acceptance and love.
Scatter us to the ends of the earth
so we may find fertile ground and begin to bear much fruit to your glory.
This we ask in the name of the one who lived and died an extreme death
in order that we may have life and peace,
Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Sing: O Christ, Lamb of God

**O Christ, Lamb of God,
sharing our story, our story,
oh grant us, grant us your peace.
Oh grant us, grant us your peace.**

**© 2004 This Here Music (ASCAP) words, Richard Bruxvoort Colligan
Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150**

Words of Grace

Based on Isaiah 40 (NIV)

In the wilderness, God prepares a way.
Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of God will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
Thanks be to God.

The Peace

ENGAGING THE WORD

Scripture Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18

15 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

2 But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” **3** And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” **4** But the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” **5** He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” **6** And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

7 Then he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.” **8** But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” **9** He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” **10** He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. **11** And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. **18** On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.”

Psalm 27

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴ One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

⁶ Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

⁷ Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸ "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

⁹ Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

¹⁰ If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

¹² Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Sing: *The Lord is my light, my light and salvation Jacques Berthier TiS74 (4x)*

<https://youtu.be/r64gcGMNhDE?si=H9ry-Qs7Cw7MRLMi>

The Lord is my light,
my light and salvation:
in God I trust,
in God I trust.

© Les Presses de Taizé (France) (GIA Publications)1978; words, Jacques Berthier Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

Christian Scriptures

Philippians 3:17—4:1

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Luke 13:31–35

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³²He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Sing: Dear mother God Janet Wootten (Tune: Londonderry Air)

Dear Mother God,
your wings are warm around us,
we are enfolded in your love and care

safe in the dark,
your heartbeat's pulse surrounds us,
you call to us,
for you are always there.

You call to us,
for we are in your image.
We wait on you,
the nest is cold and bare;
high over head your wing beats call us onward.
Filled with your power,
we ride the empty air.

Words By Janet Wootton

Words © 1991 Stainer & Bell (admin. Hope Publishing Company)

Offering

Loving and gracious God,
we bring before you our gifts,
our wealth, our goods and our lives.
May they be used to help those in the wilderness spaces of life,
those who are hungry in body and spirit,
those who are thirsty for justice and love,
and for the lonely and grieving hearts.
Amen.

Reflection

Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18, Luke 13:31–35

Today, we are focusing on the theme of God's promises and what it means to trust in the faithfulness of our God. As we reflect on the stories in Genesis 15 and Luke 13, we see two different situations that reveal a common truth: trusting in God's promises is essential, no matter the circumstances we face. In Genesis, we encounter Abram, a man who is called by God to trust in promises that he cannot yet see or understand. In

Luke, we witness Jesus confronted with danger and opposition, yet he continues to trust in God's plan. Both of these stories show us that, even in uncertain times, we can trust in God's faithfulness.

In Genesis 15, Abram is deeply troubled. He has no children, and he wonders how God's promise of making him the father of many nations will come to pass. Abram is old, and his wife Sarai is beyond the age of having children. The promise seems impossible, and doubt begins to creep into Abram's heart. But then God speaks directly to Abram, saying, "Do not be afraid. I am your shield, your very great reward." In the midst of Abram's doubt, God reassures him of his presence, protection, and reward. Yet, Abram, still uncertain, asks, "How can this be? I don't have a child, and my servant is the one who will inherit everything." God responds by showing Abram the stars in the sky, saying, "So shall your offspring be." In that moment, Abram chooses to trust. He believes in God's promise, even though he cannot see how it will happen, and God counts it to him as righteousness. God then makes a covenant with Abram, promising him the land and descendants, despite the seeming impossibility. Through this act of trust, Abram steps into the unknown, embracing God's faithfulness and his promises. Fast forward to Luke 13, where we find Jesus facing imminent danger. The Pharisees come to warn Jesus that Herod is after him, likely wanting to kill him. Jesus, however, does not allow fear to dictate his actions. In response, he boldly tells the Pharisees, "Go tell that fox [Herod], 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'" Jesus faces real threats, yet he remains steadfast in his mission. Despite the fear that surrounded him, Jesus places his trust fully in God's plan. Just like Abram, Jesus is not deterred by fear. Instead, he trusts in God's plan, knowing that God's promises will be fulfilled, regardless of the challenges before him. Both Abram and Jesus teach us the same lesson: trust in God's faithfulness, even when the future seems uncertain and fear surrounds us.

Now, consider our own lives. We live in a world that often seems to be filled with fear and uncertainty. News reports tell of natural disasters, violence, war, and suffering. We can easily become consumed by the fears of our own safety, our future, or our worth. But fear, as natural as it may be, should not have control over us. It often prevents us from stepping into the fullness of God's promises and trusting that he will provide. This brings to mind the story of Charles Blondin, the famous tightrope walker. In 1849, Blondin became the first person to cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope. He didn't just cross it once; he did it many times with daring stunts, such as riding a bicycle on the tightrope, walking on poles, and even cooking an omelette in the middle of the rope. His incredible feats drew large crowds eager to see what he would do next. One day, after crossing the falls blindfolded and pushing a wheelbarrow, he asked the crowd, "Do you think I can do it again with someone in the wheelbarrow?" The crowd erupted in applause, shouting, "Yes! Yes! Yes! You are amazing! You can do anything!" But then Blondin asked a simple question: "Who

will volunteer to get in the wheelbarrow?" The crowd fell silent. Despite their cheers, no one was willing to trust him enough to step into the wheelbarrow. Sometimes, our trust in God can be like that crowd. We may say, "Yes, God can do anything! He is amazing!" but when it comes time to take action and trust God with our own lives, we become silent or hesitant. We want to believe, but stepping into the wheelbarrow feels too risky. Yet, like Abram and like Jesus, we are called to trust in God's promises and step out in faith. We may not see how God will fulfill his promises, just as Abram couldn't see how he would become the father of many nations. But God's faithfulness is not dependent on what we can see; it is based on his character and his commitment to his word.

I want to share a personal story that illustrates this point. When I first arrived in Australia as an immigrant, I was stepping into an unknown world. Many of you can relate to this feeling of stepping into a new place, where everything is unfamiliar. Among Korean immigrants, there is a saying: "Your life in a new country is shaped by the person who picks you up at the airport." When I first landed at Sydney Airport, two people came to pick us up — both were members of a local church. One of them lived in a suburb called Ashfield. At that time, I knew nothing about Sydney, so I simply followed along, trusting that they would take us somewhere safe. Ashfield is a suburb with a large community of Asian immigrants — especially Koreans, Chinese, and Vietnamese. But what surprised me the most was that right next to the church we attended, there was an old cemetery. It was not a large cemetery, but it was an old and somewhat creepy place, and every time I passed it, I couldn't help but think about the history it held. When I first saw it, I thought to myself, "Wow, this is definitely Australia — everything is a little different here!" I rented a small unit in Ashfield and lived there for our first year. To be honest, it was very difficult to adjust at first. It felt so different from the image of Australia that I had imagined — you know, blue beaches, bright sunshine, koalas, and kangaroos. Over time, we got used to the place, but whenever I walked past the cemetery at night — especially on rainy nights — it still gave me chills. In Korea, cemeteries are usually located far away in the mountains, and they are often seen as scary places, the background for ghost stories we heard as children. So, I used to joke to myself, "If a ghost shows up here, will it speak to me in English? Or, if it's a very thoughtful ghost, will it speak to me in Korean?" And then I would answer myself, "Well, whatever language it speaks, I'll just keep saying, 'I beg your pardon?' over and over." But looking back now, I realize that what really mattered was that there were people who welcomed us, who stood by us when everything was new and frightening. And ultimately, it was God who was waiting for us in that new land — God, who walks with us into the unknown. Just like God said to Abraham when Abram was stepping into an unfamiliar future: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." (Genesis 15:1) And just like Jesus said as He looked over Jerusalem: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." (Luke 13:34) Friends, God is the one who comes

to meet us at the “airport” of our lives — in those moments when we step into the unknown, when we are afraid, when we are alone. And he says, “Don’t be afraid. I am with you.”

In conclusion, we are called to trust in the faithfulness of God, even when the world is full of fear and uncertainty. Like Abram and like Jesus, we can have confidence in God’s promises, knowing that he is always with us. When fear tries to take hold of our hearts, let us respond with faith. God is faithful. His promises are sure, and he will never leave us. So let us step out boldly into the future he has prepared for us, trusting in his unshakable faithfulness. Amen.

Announcements

Prayers for Others

Play video of AFG563 / NCYC'03 / The Red Book How long must we cry out? (Robin Mann) . [Lyric video https://youtu.be/qJEDa6-0ISU?si=h8LDJN5X5BQ8Iqkg](https://youtu.be/qJEDa6-0ISU?si=h8LDJN5X5BQ8Iqkg)

Compassionate God,
in a world where fear seems to trump love,
we bring our concerns and needs for the world to you now.

Where greed and power seem always to win
and people live with hunger and despair:
as fear grips us, bring us back to your loving presence.

Where violence and destruction seem to reign
and people’s lives are torn apart in grief and pain:
as fear grips us, bring us back to your loving presence.

Where marginalisation and oppression seem to be the norm
and people are cast aside unjustly, unheard and unseen:
as fear grips us, bring us back to your loving presence.

Where selfishness and comfort seem to take priority
and our world suffers and moans under the weight of neglect:
as fear grips us, bring us back to your loving presence.

Compassionate God,
in a world where fear seems to trump love,

bring us back to you and lead us on in faith.
Amen.

The 'Abba' Prayer:

You are invited to pray in the spirit of the Abba/Lord's Prayer, and in your original language, as appropriate

**God, who cares for us,
The wonder of whose presence fills us with awe.**

**Let kindness, justice and love shine in our world.
Let your secrets be known here as they are in heaven.
Give us the food and the hope we need for today.**

**Forgive us our wrongdoing
as we forgive the wrongs done to us.
Protect us from pride and from despair
and from the fear and hate which can swallow us up.**

**In you is truth, meaning, glory and power,
while worlds come and go.
Amen. (MFurlong/nwi)**

SENDING OUT

Sing: *Be my keeper Worldmaking.net; text, Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan*

**My help and hope who never slumbers,
you who made the earth and heavens,
I lift my eyes up to the mountains -
you're my help and hope to come,
you're my help and hope to come.
*Be my keeper as I'm moving
for I am close to someplace deeper.
As you've held this world forever,
be my keeper, be my keeper***

**O Source of Life, my soul is longing,
catch me now for I am falling.**

Oh, be my shade in sunshine burning,
be my comfort in the night,
be my comfort in the night.

*Be my keeper as I'm moving
for I am close to someplace deeper.
As you've held this world forever,
be my keeper, be my keeper.*

O Heart of Love, you have sustained me
from before my birth and always.
You've been with me for all my journeys,
help and hope, O Source of Life,
help and hope, O Source of Life.

*Be my keeper as I'm moving
for I am close to someplace deeper.
As you've held this world forever,
be my keeper, be my keeper.*

© Worldmaking.net; text, Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan Reproduced under
Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

Blessing/Benediction

And now, as we leave this place
where we have been fed and sustained,
may we enter the wilderness places of this world,
taking with us the living water and the bread of life.
May the blessing of God,
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
be with us each step of the way.
Amen.

Exit Song: *Peace be with you*

As you journey from this day,
to the challenge of tomorrow's way:
God to guide you,
Christ beside you,

peace be with you.

In the season to come,
know the promise of the Living One:
God to guide you,
Christ beside you,
Peace be with you.

And whenever your burdens are heavy,
when the road seems too hard for you to carry on;

then remember God's call,
and the promise that God shares it all:
love surrounding, grace abounding,
Spirit's treasure, without measure:

God to guide you,
Christ beside you,
peace be with you.

Words and music: David Busch © 2015

Wattleseed Publishing. cmla.org.au

