**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**3rd July 2022**

**Genesis 15:1-6**

**Gathering**

What must it be like

To live under a promise

Wondering if everyday

Might be the day

The promise will come true

What must it be like

To see names among the stars

Of generations yet unborn

And the adventures they will have

In a world we will never know

What must it be like

To share a faith

That finds its meaning

Not in the soaring buildings of religion

But in God’s own midnight cathedral

Let us gather under this promise

More ancient that stone

More ancient than word

More ancient than scripture

Yet calls us, still, into tomorrow

**Welcome**

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister on New Kilpatrick Parish, and thanks for letting us meet you under the stars, not that many can be seen behind our usual Scottish summer rainclouds. Maybe the faith we have is simply to believe there really are stars as we hardly see them!

But under the stars is where we join our story today, of Abram, the first of the ancients who lived under them and travelled under them, each day being reminded of that promise God gave: Look up Abram, look up: how many stars can you see…

I’m just glad Abram wasn’t Scottish or he’d be seeing nothing. And so Abram began to count…

**Prayer**

Great God of every shining constellation

Of every name that’s threaded through the stars

The promises born deep within the cosmos

We meet each other

And the future

Under heaven’s midnight canopy

And we give thanks

With silence

For it is all we fine

To respond to the wonder

A world constantly revealing the promises of God…

Waiting to offer the covenant that has been written into its fabric…

Longing to be known as the cathedral of grace…

Yet

Forgive us, O Great creator,

For how we treat this world of promise

Treat the fabric of heaven replaced by the fabric of the world

Forgive how we behave towards each child of promise

Each one born equally in your sight

But not in each others

Forgive how we speak of each other

Jarring with the song of creation

Rewritten every morning

May we come back to you

Return to the promise

That is written with our names

Radiating in the darkness of night

And renewed in the dawn of every sunrise

(Pause)

Let us join together in the global prayer

Our father

**Reading Genesis 15:1-6**

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.”

2But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” 4But 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.” 5He 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.” 6And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

**Story**

Abram strokes his greying beard

He is an old man

Certainly for the times he is living in

Old

And retired

And his beard is long

And he has this habit of stroking it

All the way down

When he is thinking back

Remembering through the years

To that night when the stars seemed brighter than they are now

He was younger then

Eyesight was better

But his memory is still clear

And as he strokes his beard he remembers

How the stars seemed to move that night

Or perhaps it was just a quiver

But they gently spun

In rhythm to the voice in his head

That he recognised as the one that called him out into his geriatric travels

It was irritating him

It was now telling him to look up

Always look up

And he remembers leaving his Beduin tent

With frustration

Sarai had been crying over no children

And he didn’t know what to do

And this voice was pushing him

‘Look up”

So he stormed out

And stood there

Looking at the sky

The same sky it always was

“There” said the voice

“It’s been there all the time and you’ve never noticed it before

There, is my promise to you.”

As he remembers he laughs
(it was something he was becoming known for

Him and his wife)

He remembers staring deeply into the sky

And finding nothing.

The voice waited

“It’s obvious, look, Abram!”

“I am looking!”

“Then what do you see”

“I see a million stars.”

“A million? Have you counted them.”

“No I haven’t. I don’t have enough years left to count them.”

“That’s my promise to you: as many stars you see in the sky

Will be the number of your children”

And Abram laughs

And as he remembers he always laughs at this bit

He had been travelling under the promise all his life

And never had noticed before

He continued to stroke his beard

How many grey hairs did he have now?

Too many, all these children,

It would make anyone’s beard go grey

**Reflection**

I have a watch that is meant to be smart… It tells me things I didn’t know I needed to know… like my heart rate… how many steps I take and encourages me each morning with ‘Way to go Roddy, you closed your exercise ring yesterday, lets do more today’… It tells me how loud the noises are around me and warns me when it is too loud… an alarm which tells me not when to waken up… but when to go to bed… (You need your sleep Roddy)… and my favourite at the moment… it automatically knows when I wash my hands and dings after precisely 20 seconds… though it also thinks I’m washing my hands when I’m peeling potatoes and I get extra points for that…

The other thing it has is the night sky… and whenever I am in the world… it can show me a map of the heavens… and identify the constellations…

I bet Abraham would have liked one of these… or perhaps he wouldn’t… preferring rather to sit under the real thing… and create his own constellations of imagined names of imagined children and grandchildren… which he didn’t yet have…

He was given this promise… of a star field of generations… and each night he saw that promise… lived under it… waiting… Not passively and contentedly… but restlessly… He was quite happy to argue with God… and he did… about when the first child was to be born…

At 75 he must have been wondering… and as the months and years went on… that wonder must have become concern… Had he heard right… did God really speak of promise in the stars…

What must it be like to live under a promise… wondering if today would be the day…

And to live that way… for 25 years… must have taken some encouragement to do so… O course… Abram tried to force the promise… identifying others who would become his heirs…

But that didn’t work… God always interrupted the moments Abram tried to control his present… I’m not sure he ever got round to trusting the future God had planned… to eventually quit trying to control his present…

And there is a big faithful, loving lesson there because it is easy to assume our present shapes our future… It is what we base so much on… and when that present becomes problematic… when there is crisis and pain and uncertainty in the present… we start worrying about the future…

We can easily shrink as God’s people… in the face of fear… of being in the wilderness… when rules are broken… and the present is difficult… and all of that seems stronger than God… and even love…

Faith can wilt when that happens… and in may ways the pandemic has done that… and our response has been of fear for the future… I know absolutely that is where I am… especially with the church… and we allow that fear to dictate the future…

Abram was there too… exactly there… fear in the present (having no children) began dictating his future (concubines and others being made heirs)…

But what came to be true for Abram was an understanding of faith… that had far more to do with trust than with certainty… learning to trust God to be God even if he couldn’t say exactly who God was… for God to shape the future… even if he couldn’t say how that could happen… trusting God to hold the present even as there was not one shred of evidence that was so…

Might we learn to do that again… as congregations facing the future… as parishes… as communities… that we might learn as much about the ways of God from paying attention to that promise still cast across the heavens each night… as we can from paying attention to presbytery plans or congregational audits…

Perhaps it is not here with our doctrine and creeds and traditions that is the smart place to encounter God… but under a night sky… where we can join Abram… still counting… still wondering… still amazed at the promise of God… forever revealing itself…

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

Loving God

In the long promise that has accompanied us

In every generation

We pray

That today this promise

Shapes a peace for Ukraine and Yemen and Syria

That speaks into the future

For those who are hurt and lost and grieving

And to all nations

Wondering when the present is in crisis

What will the future be

In the long promise that has spoken in every generation

May we hear it speak justice to those

Who receive no justice in our world

Because of political belief

Because of culture

Because of religion

Because of history

In the long promise that has constantly been with us

May such presence be known

To those who have no home

Fleeing over borders

Refugees in their own land or foreign land

Frightened of the present

And scared of the future

In the long promise longer than our own promises

May its tenacity bring hope

To those who hunger

And those who control trade

Those who are poor

And those who are powerful

Those who seek renewal

And those whose morals make them turn their backs

In the long promise that is ours

May those who are ours

Our families and friends

Those ill and those recovering

Those with mental and physical illness

Those anxious

Those lonely

Those worried

Know the promise that renews all futures

And the God who makes that promise to all

Hear our prayer

So be it

Amen

**Blessing**

**Doxology**