

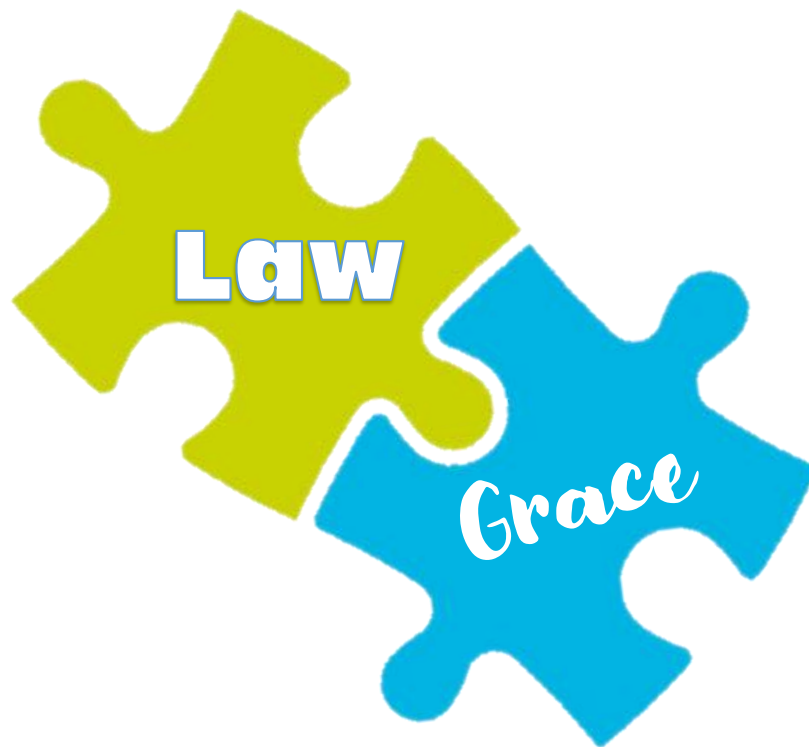


HOON HAY Presbyterian CHURCH

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Today's service is led by: Michael Reid



'Relationship is the difference between law and grace.'
Dr Charles Stanley (1932 -)

Mission Statement

To love and serve the Lord Jesus in the Hoon Hay Community
Worshiping God as a family
Offering opportunities to grow in faith
Sharing God's love with people in our community and beyond

VACCINE PASS REQUIRED FOR ATTENDANCE TODAY

ORDER OF SERVICE

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Notices and Celebrations

Singing: 'Love divine, all loves excelling'

Dedication of Offering

RESPONSIVE READING:

Psalm 40: 1-5
(NIV)

¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.

² *He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;*

he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.

³ *He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.*

*Many will see and fear the LORD
and put their trust in him.*

⁴ Blessed is the one
who trusts in the LORD,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.

⁵ *Many, LORD my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.*

SCRIPTURE READINGS (NIV)

Old Testament

Genesis 21: 1-20

New Testament

Galatians 4: 21-31

Intercessory Prayer

Reflection: 'Three Distortions of Faith' – Galatians 4

We celebrate Communion

COMMUNION RESPONSE:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is truly right and our greatest joy,

To give you thanks and praise,

Eternal God, creator and ruler of the universe.



Singing: 'How Marvellous, How Wonderful'

May the Lord, mighty God
Bless and Keep you forever.
Grant you peace, perfect peace
Courage in every endeavour.

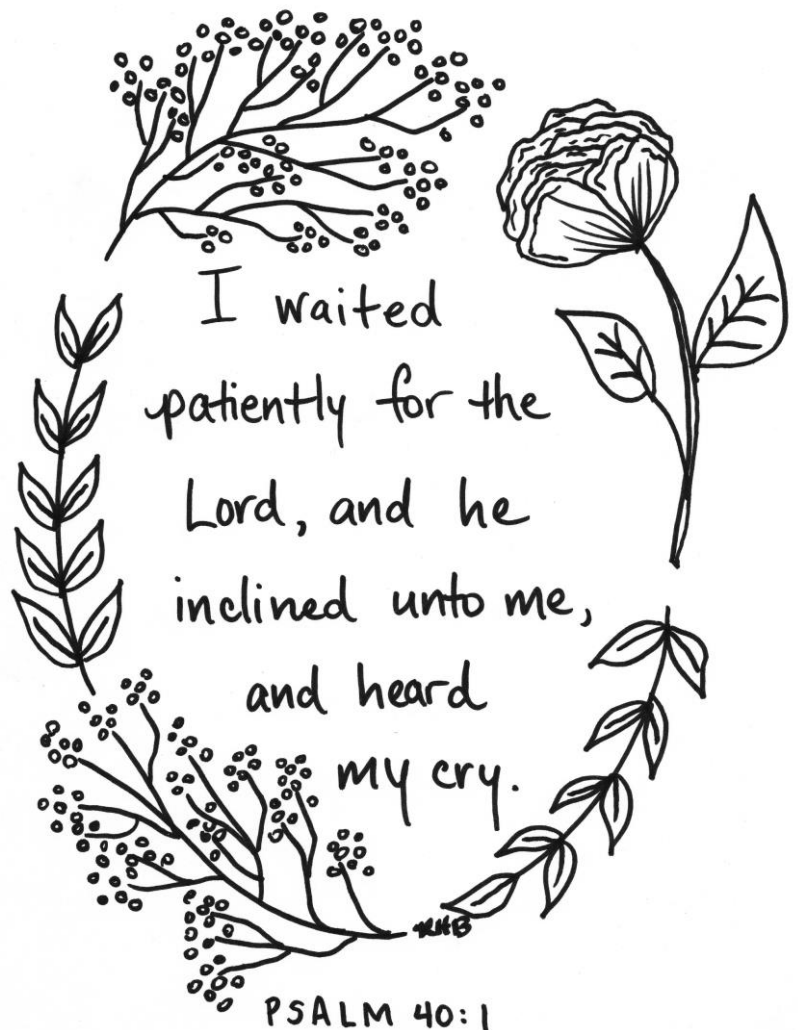
BENEDICTION

(Tune: Edelweiss)

Lift up your eyes and seek His face
And His grace forever,
May the Lord, Mighty God
Bless and keep you forever.

Amen

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU IN TODAY'S MESSAGE?



READINGS

Genesis 21: 1-21 (NIV)

The Birth of Isaac

¹ Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." ⁷ And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

⁶ Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." ⁷ And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

⁸ The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹ But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰ and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

¹¹ The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹² But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. ¹³ I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

¹⁴ Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob.

¹⁷ God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰ God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. ²¹ While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

Galatians 4: 21-31 (NIV)

Hagar and Sarah

²¹Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.

²⁴These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. ²⁵Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written:

“Be glad, barren woman,
you who never bore a child;
shout for joy and cry aloud,
you who were never in labour;
because more are the children of the desolate woman
than of her who has a husband.”

²⁸Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. ³⁰But what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.”

³¹Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

TEACHING NOTES

We return to the Galatians series we began late last year. Today we're considering Chapter 4 (the final section). The overall theme is clear: Paul refutes 'Judaisers' those who believed Gentile believers must obey the Jewish law to be saved, and to call Christians to faith and freedom in Christ. He draws on the story of Abraham, his wife Sarah, Hagar (his Egyptian concubine) and their respective children, Isaac and Ishmael. It's important to remember Paul had been a Pharisee (a very learned and devout Jew). He understood the law and had been a fierce persecutor of Christians (e.g. approving of Stephen's murder, Acts 8:1-2).

People are saved because of faith in Christ not because of their actions. Drawing on the story of Hagar and Sarah (Genesis 21), Paul contrasts those who are enslaved to the law represented by Hagar, the slave woman, with those free from the law represented by Sarah (formerly Sarai) the free woman. Moreover, Hagar's abuse of Sarai (Genesis 16:4) represents the persecution the Gentile believers were receiving from Judaisers who insisted on keeping the law to be saved. Sarah's story is instructive: God eventually kept the promise to give her a son – just as those in Christ through faith will also finally triumph.

It helps to know the Abram/Abraham, Sarai/Sarah story and how Hagar provides Abram with a child – with Sarai's approval (a common practice at the time). However, tensions arose between the women with Hagar despising her mistress (16:4) and Sarai mistreating Hagar (16:6). No wonder there would be tensions between their children in the next generation. Paul's point though, is that faith in God's promise is what saves us: not our actions. He invites us to consider these ancient events metaphorically (Galatians 4:24), which was perhaps a common approach to explain or present an argument in his day (he would also know his Jewish readers in the Galatian churches would be very familiar with the story.) Reading further in Genesis, we see real weaknesses in Sarah's character but God is faithful in spite of her failings and Isaac is born in very old age (Genesis 21:2). Even the thought of this was baffling to her and fittingly Isaac means 'he laughs'. More importantly, we see that *God responds to faith even in the midst of failure*. Paul also cites Isaiah 54:1 where Israel is likened to a barren woman but as in the Isaac story, God will permit her to have many children and change her mourning into singing. All of this has been well understood by Paul when in 3:28 he tells the Galatians that in Christ all people can be part of God's family (Jew and Gentile).

There are three main distortions of Christian faith that Paul addresses: 1. Judaised Christianity, 2. Legalised Christianity, and 3. Lawless Christianity (these will be discussed in the message). They remain a danger today, too, when we seek to somehow find greater legitimacy or authenticity to our faith by embracing Jewish practices or traditions; reduce the faith to a list of rules (a long list of 'don'ts'), or perhaps in the other direction, distort freedom in Christ by embracing lawlessness and dismissing a proper understanding of the law. All these emphases try to add to the work of the cross, elevate human effort, and undermine the truth of the gospel: i.e. it is by grace we are saved through faith, not works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

PASTOR'S REFLECTION

The Beijing Winter Olympics are in full swing and as we know, the New Zealand snowboarder, Zoi Sadowski-Synnott has already won gold in the Slopestyle event. It was thrilling to watch and just how these competitors can fly through the air as they do and with such confidence and skill is hard to grasp. It's something most people sitting at home in their armchairs will never understand. It's another world. We can only wonder how thrilling – and scary – it would be to line up on skis or a board at the top of a sheer drop of icy snow, and within seconds know you'll be reaching speeds of 70 km/h, flying through the air and having to remember all the moves and techniques required to be a champion! As with all athletes and sporting achievers, what we saw in Zoi's success is only the very public spectacle behind which lies many years of training, coaching, and disciplined hard work. No one just decides casually to put skis on or jump on a board and perform as she does. I'm only guessing but imagine the preparation would be on many levels: a high degree of personal fitness, trampoline and gymnastics training; years of practice 'normal' skiing, and then specialised coaching and practice landing safely on foam mats and pads, etc., to perfect specific manoeuvres. Then, on the slopes all these elements have to come together and be practised over and over – and over again. This is followed by numerous competitions in the lead-up to qualify for the premier international event: the Olympic Games.

Sporting success is much admired in our culture. Indeed, heroes and role models are these days more likely to be sporting achievers than from the political arena, arts and culture, or public service. Modern research and media have made the foibles and weaknesses of our leaders very apparent. Achievers shoot to the top but often struggle to maintain their performance, and in some cases, quickly fade from view. Hopefully that won't be the case for Zoi, but time will tell.

The Apostle Paul likens the Christian life to running a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). The prize is much more however, than a laurel, medal, or momentary prominence. It's about persevering and gaining eternal life. Let's be clear: we *already have* eternal life when we respond in faith to Christ, but our earthly life is to be lived in such a way we grow towards spiritual maturity and this should have the intentionality and mindset of a runner in a race. He/She prepares diligently, training body and mind and then gives it their all during the race. To extend the analogy a little further, the 'race' is more like a marathon than a 50-metre sprint. Recently I have spoken about 'consecration'. This is an old-fashioned word now but it simply means 'dedication'. Coming to faith and baptism (etc.) are obviously very significant, but all of life is to be our follow-up: loving God, staying in fellowship, and serving others. These things are similar to the discipline and focus that an athlete or top sportsperson needs to demonstrate.

So, may we continue enjoy watching the Winter Olympics and marvel at the skill and achievements of those who gain the medals. May this also, however, be a subtle reminder of the need to stay on the pathway of discipleship and spiritual growth!

Blessings for a good week,

Michael