

- Our reading from the Book of Genesis tells the story of God making a covenant with Abraham and Sarah.
- God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah makes them “the ancestors of a multitude of nations.”
- And we have come to understand that the descendants of Abraham and Sarah are not just those who can trace biological kinship to them but includes all those who trust in God’s promise of faithfulness.
 - As the apostle Paul lays out in his letter to the Romans, we are all descendants of Abraham and Sarah because we have put our faith in the faithfulness of God.
- With Abraham and Sarah, then, we share a common inheritance.
- And that inheritance is this.
- Firstly, with Abraham and Sarah we share in the gift of hope that is the promise of a future.
- Abraham and Sarah could not have children together.
- They had reached the end of the line for themselves and for their family.
- As far as they could see, their family stopped with them.
- In the context of the time, no children meant no continuity, but simply the end.
- Yet God’s promise and God’s faithfulness brought about something new for them.
- With the promise of children and descendants, their future came alive with hope and possibility.
- Their future was no longer defined or confined by what they themselves could or could not achieve.
- Their future, instead, was in the hands of God “who brings life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist”
- Their future and our future is always alive in the hands of God.
- And this gift of hope that is the promise of a future has always been God’s gift to us.
 - It was present in God’s promise to Noah and his family that there would be life and future for them beyond the destruction of the flood.
 - It is present, as we have heard today, in God’s promise to Sarah and Abraham that they will have descendants who will bring blessing to the world.

- It is present in God's promise of freedom to the people of Israel held captive in Egypt.
 - It is present in God's promise of return to the people of Israel exiled in Babylon.
 - And it is present most fully in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, where we come to understand that even death itself cannot thwart God's promise, God's purpose and God's power.
 - The faithfulness of God is such that we have a future beyond even death.
 - There is no future apart from God.
- With Abraham and Sarah we share in the gift of hope that is the promise of a future.
 - With them we also share the reality of an identity and a sense of belonging.
 - For Abraham and Sarah and for their descendants in the many centuries that followed, male circumcision was understood as the physical sign of trust in God's covenantal promises and the mark of entrance into the covenant community.
 - For us, that sign is baptism.
 - We are baptised into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which means we have entered into a community of faith that puts its trust in God's power for life and hope that transcends even death.
 - We are baptised into a community that trusts in the faithfulness of God.
 - That is who we are:
 - a people who trust in God,
 - a people who take our identity and our sense of belonging from the truth of God's faithfulness to us.
 - And this is the only identity, beneath all other identities, that tells us who we really and truly are.
 - We are the beloved children of God and nothing we or anyone else can do can alter the eternal fact of God's love and faithfulness to us.
 - With Abraham and Sarah and all who followed after them we share in the gift of hope that comes with the promise of a future.
 - With them we share an identity and a sense of belonging as people beloved of God.
 - And with them we also share a vocation, a calling, as people who trust in the faithfulness of God.
 - And our calling is to continue to trust in the faithfulness of God and to witness to that trust.
 - And that's what brings us to our gospel reading this morning.

- Jesus has been speaking quite openly to his disciples of what lies ahead of him in Jerusalem.
- He will undergo great suffering, and be rejected and killed, and after three days rise again.

- It has always interested me that the disciples never seem to hear that last bit.
- They hear the bit about suffering, rejection, and death, but they do not seem to hear the promise of resurrection.
- And I guess we can understand that.
- Suffering, rejection and death are concrete realities.
- They are imaginable threats to our actual existence.
 - And in Jesus' time they were entirely imaginable threats, all too real, given the controversy that Jesus was stirring up and the threat he was perceived to be by the temple authorities.
- Resurrection, though, that is something altogether more abstract, or so it would seem,
 - something that is apparently not even on the radar for Jesus' disciples.
- And so Peter rebukes Jesus, seeking to turn him from this path, because all Peter can see at the end of this is death.
- For Peter, Jesus' words evoke a dead end, beyond which there can be no good future.

- But Jesus rebukes Peter in turn, and says to him.
 - "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."
- And then he goes on to teach them that if they wish to become his followers they must take up their cross and follow him and that they must lose their lives in order to save them.
- The difference here between Jesus and his disciples, and us as well, perhaps, is that Jesus can see life beyond the death that is coming.
- He has put his trust in the faithfulness of God "who brings life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist".
- Jesus has hope in the promise of a future.

- All Peter can see and all too often all that we can see, though, is death.
- We too miss the bit about resurrection and the promise of life, and that limits our hope.
- It limits our capacity to think and to act and to trust in something different.
- So, in a way that is entirely understandable, we steel ourselves against pain and fear and loss and change, and we do our best to avoid those things, to limit our exposure

to those things, because in those things we see only death and the end of our hope or our happiness or our security.

- But the good news is that we cannot actually limit the faithfulness of God.
- In life; in death; in life beyond death, God is faithful to us, always holding before us the hope of a new future.

- And the truth of the matter is that sometimes the only way into that new future is through death.
- Sometimes we have to lose our lives.
- We have to give up the things we cling to.
- Sometimes we have to give up our cherished ideas about the way things are or the way they should be.
- Sometimes we have to give up the life that we have known with all the comfort of its familiarity in order to enter into God's new future.
- God called Abraham and Sarah to leave behind the lives that they knew and to step into an unknown future relying only on the strength of God's promise of faithfulness to them.
- And we are called to do the same.
- But we do so knowing that God holds out to us the same love and faithfulness that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and that is the guarantee of our hope.
- Thanks be to God.