

## Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2023

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Readings

[Genesis 12:1-9 \(CEV\)](#)

[Mark 10:17-31 \(CEV\)](#)

Reflection

What is eternal life? Is it to never die or to never grow old, and would it make a difference? Can you imagine living forever in this experience of life with all its frustrations and challenges, perhaps slowly growing older but nothing ever changing – some might call that hell! Can you imagine staying forever young while all those around you, including your family, grow old and die – that would be a lonely existence. But what is age?

Abram was seventy-five when he set out on a long and arduous journey, taking with him everyone he loved and everything he possessed. A lot of people make a final move as they reach an older age, maybe into a retirement home or at least downsizing. Not many would contemplate across many lands to set up a new home. Imagine setting off for a land of which you have no knowledge, no relatives or friends there, and where probably no one will speak your language.

Yet that is precisely what many people, of many ages, are doing around the world as they dream of a better life. Their journey is dangerous, long and unpredictable. Their welcome in the new land equally unpredictable, or perhaps it isn't, we have all seen the pictures and read the news. How would our attitude change if we viewed refugees and asylum seekers as modern day Abrams?

There is a dangerous nationalistic tendency which encourages us to see strangers as enemies, and yet we believe this earth is God's not ours; we believe that God speaks to all people, loves all people, and wants the best for all people. We believe that creation is inherently positive but recognise that all too often our actions create a negative experience for others.

The rich young man in the story from Mark wanted to ensure he entered the Kingdom. Maybe he wanted reassurance that he was ticking all the boxes and his future was ensured. He was disappointed. Jesus said he had to give up his independence and security and live as one with creation. He couldn't do it, can we? Often we confuse eternal life and the kingdom. Jesus said the kingdom was already partially here – it is not some paradise to be experienced after death to this reality, it is something to work towards in this life. To do that we have to change the way we live and be prepared to share all we have with others. To quote Micah, we have to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God: we have to work to change the injustices in the world, we have to embrace forgiveness and we have to acknowledge and use our skills and gifts to make a difference to the lives of others. The more we give the more we will receive.

We are in Fairtrade fortnight, an annual reminder that our choices in what we buy can affect the lives of those who produce what we buy. Our choice will have a positive or negative effect on their experience of life. In the current cost of living crisis it would be easy to forget the pledge to trade fairly but we must remember that is also a judgement of people's worth. Fairtrade goods cost more to ensure that those producing those goods receive a fair price to enable them to feed their family and educate their children and have access to medical help. Things we largely take for granted. As we moan about a shortage of cucumbers, salad and tomatoes brought about by abnormal weather conditions in southern Europe, are we forgetting that without those crops to sell people will be left without the means to support themselves.

All around we witness inequality, especially in the reward of skills and gifts. Fairtrade is the tip of the iceberg. If we are to do justice we must challenge these inequalities in the rewarding of gifts and skills. We must champion the worth of all people through a fair and just reward for the skills and gifts they offer to creation. The effects of Brexit highlight how we have undervalued the gifts and skills of those who have travelled to this country to secure a better, and just future, for their family.

In autumn 2022, on the World Day for Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis said we must 'build the future with migrants and refugees, we must travel with migrants and refugees in journeying towards building the Kingdom of God' Around the country there are many churches who are working to assist refugees, here in Luton

All Saints church has a drop-in centre. It started with collecting clothes but it has grown in to something more, offering help with daily living, form filling, food and equipment. There are also innovative charities working to build communities that embrace refugees, sewing clubs where refugees can sew items which can be sold to raise funds and at the same time learn English. Community kitchens which encourage a sharing of food culture and provide training in food hygiene, a footstep into employment and also a growing together.

To follow the way of Jesus does not mean placing ourselves at the mercy of street living but it does challenge us to live lightly and give up the baggage and encumbrances which weigh us down and make travelling forward difficult. Are we prepared to step out and support those activities which seek to make a difference, could we as church be one of those places. Will we do justice, and make choices for the benefit of brothers and sisters living in very different circumstances? If Abram, at seventy-five could set out on a journey to a new and distant land, shouldn't we here God's call to journey together to a new land – the kingdom of God, a land of justice and joy where all are encouraged, all are loved and all skills and gifts are valued and rewarded fairly.