

Wednesday Home Study, 10th June 2020

Pray: that the Holy Spirit will enlighten your mind and give you understanding as you study God's word. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to discern and hear any special message that God has for you this day.

Read Gen 18:1-15

18 The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. 3 He said, "My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on — since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 6 And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." 7 Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 8 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

9 They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." 10 Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" 13 The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

NRSV

In the 15th century, the Russian painter Andrei Rublev created an icon based upon Genesis 18:1-8. This icon, called *The Hospitality of Abraham* is Rublev's most famous work and the most famous of all Russian icons.



During my first clergy retreat after my ordination, the Retreat Leader gave each one of us a copy of this painting. I sensed that there was something special in this painting and have carried it in my bible ever since, even though I never quite fully understood what it is.

1. Take a moment to meditate upon this painting and then answer this question: What feelings or emotions does this painting induce in you? Write them down.
2. What do think this painting depicts?

At a simple level, we can agree that the painting depicts the ‘*three men*’ who visited Abraham at the Oak of Mamre as he was having his siesta that hot day. (Gen 18:1-2)

3. What was Abraham’s response and actions when he saw them? The three visitors looked like ordinary travelers. But Abraham seemed to think that there was something special about these visitors. His eagerness to entertain them was more than ordinary politeness, even by eastern standards. Were they three angels? Or were they (as the NIV Study Bible suggests) two angels and ‘... the Lord himself’? Or were they something more?

4. What term does the writer of Genesis 18 use to describe the ‘three men’ in verses, 1, 13 & 14?

The Hebrew word used in these verses is ‘*Yahweh*’, the Jewish national name of God.

We don’t know what was in Rublev’s mind, but his painting is certainly full of symbolism. Can you see some suggestions of angel’s wings in the background? Generally Rublev’s painting is interpreted as an icon of the Holy Trinity, and is very often known by the title *The Trinity*.

Abraham’s response was to offer immediate, humble and gracious welcome and hospitality to these strangers. Indeed, he saw that it would be an honour (to himself) if they would accept his hospitality (v.3).

5. Can you recall a time when you felt honoured that someone accepted your hospitality?

Jesus encouraged hospitality such as Abraham displayed in his followers. And such hospitality is a key element in thriving churches.

6. How would you define hospitality?

Too often, hospitality focuses on who is bringing snacks for the time of fellowship after worship, or at a home group. We are not called to a radical hospitality – just an offering of welcome to the stranger, the foreigner, the neighbour who may not usually grace the doors of a church.

Read Jesus’ words in Matt 25:35-40.

Too often, we compartmentalise our religious beliefs and practices from other aspects of living. As Abraham discovered, the Holy one often appears when we least expect a visit (hottest part of the day).

7. Abraham did not join his guests as they ate – ‘... *he stood by them under the tree while they ate.*’ Why do you think he did that?

The Trinity is about relationship – the relationship between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Christianity is about relationship – our relationship with our Trinitarian God and with each other. Jesus prayed

that as the Father is in him and he is in the Father, we might be in them.
(John 17:21)

God invites you and me into the relationship that he has within himself. On the day that I began to write this study, I also began reading a book - *The Divine Dance*, author Richard Rohr - that has sat for some time in my pile of 'books I hope to get time to read one day'. To my surprise and joy, I discovered that it refers extensively to Genesis 18:1-8 and Rublev's painting as well. I have attached the introduction for you to read. This quote from p.32 resonated with me:

'This divine intention – this audacious invitation – is embedded in creation itself; it later becomes concrete, personal, and touchable in Jesus. In other words, divine inclusion – again, what we rightly name *salvation* – was Plan A and not Plan B!'

8. What do you see as the relationship between the three figures in Rublev's painting? Is there room at the table for you?

Rublev lived through a deeply troubled period in Russian history yet his paintings (particularly this one) revealed, through his devotion to God, a deep compassion and calm. At the time of Rublev, the Holy Trinity was the embodiment of spiritual unity, peace, harmony, mutual love and humility.

Just as Rublev lived through a deeply troubled period in Russian history, we too are living through some very troubled times. I encourage you to draw upon the peace, compassion and calm that we can know through our relationship with the Holy Trinity.

Finish by praying this prayer:

Loving God, give us open minds so that we are curious, give us open hands so that we may serve our neighbours, give us open eyes so that we may see you in all people, open hearts so we may receive all as a gift. Amen.

Grace & Peace
Rev Clyde