

Wednesday June 3 rd	Genesis 35	<i>60 Come, let us praise the Lord [Ps 95]</i>
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Today's hymn is a modern version of Psalm 95

- 1 Come, let us praise the Lord,
 with joy our God acclaim,
 his greatness tell abroad
 and bless his saving name.
 Lift high your songs
 before his throne
 to whom alone
 all praise belongs.
- 2 Our God of matchless worth,
 our King beyond compare,
 the deepest bounds of earth,
 the hills, are in his care.
 He all decrees,
 who by his hand
 prepared the land
 and formed the seas.
- 3 In worship bow the knee,
 our glorious God confess ;
 the great Creator, he,
 the Lord our righteousness.
 He reigns unseen :
 his flock he feeds
 and gently leads
 in pastures green.
- 4 Come, hear his voice today,
 receive what love imparts ;
 his holy will obey
 and harden not your hearts.
 His ways are best ;
 and lead at last,
 all troubles past,
 to perfect rest.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926) CCL 51436

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Sl4luwrCIU>

Our hymn today was written by Timothy Dudley-Smith. A retired Bishop, he has written over 400 hymns, the best known probably 'Tell Out My Soul', often sung during Advent. This hymn gives us the message of Psalm 95. It starts in praise, but ends with a grave warning: 'don't harden your hearts!' Reflecting on the disobedience of Israel in the desert (see Exodus 17), and their 40 years of wandering (see Numbers 14:32-35), it then makes a promise of rest for God's people. The Psalm warns us not to take God for granted, nor treat worship superficially.

In the New Testament, the book of Hebrews quotes this Psalm, as a warning and also as an encouragement. 'Encourage each other every day' it says, and 'Let us make every effort to enter God's rest . . . for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword' (Hebrews 3:13; 4:11): a warning and an encouragement indeed!

Today's reading is **Genesis 35**

Then God said to Jacob, 'Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.'

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.' So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. Then they set out, and the terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak outside Bethel. So it was named Allon Bakuth.

After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.' So he named him Israel.

And God said to him, 'I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you.' Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him.

Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.

Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, 'Don't despair, for you have another son.' As she breathed her last - for she was dying - she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar,

and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb.

Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.

Jacob had twelve sons:

The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.

The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

The sons of Rachel's servant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali.

The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah: Gad and Asher.

These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.

Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Jacob's caravan of family, servants and flocks now moves up to Bethel. In a dramatic scene, they discard the symbols of their idolatry, and in return God gives them divine protection from their enemies. In an echo of an earlier scene, Jacob builds an altar of worship, and God repeats his promises to him.

However, it is tinged with tragedy: first, the faithful old woman who had been Jacob's nurse died. Then Jacob's beloved wife Rachel died in childbirth. With her dying breath she called the child 'son of my sorrow', but Jacob named him 'son of my right hand' (ie son of good fortune),

perhaps not wishing an unlucky name on the poor motherless child. Rachel was buried south of Jerusalem, on the outskirts of Bethlehem, and today her tomb is still a place of pilgrimage for Jews, Christians and Muslims. But Jacob's family's sorrow was not yet ended, for the chapter finishes with his father Isaac's death.

Rachel's sorrow became proverbial (Jeremiah 31:15, then Matthew 2:18 referring to the massacre of the innocents). But in re-naming his son, Jacob expresses hope. In the midst of terrible sorrow, as John Gibson says, Jacob

'was able to hope that this child, born as his mother died, would see the blossoming of the blessing of which he knew, for all his trying, he possessed only the green bud'.

It's glimmers of faith and grace like this which remind us why Jacob (Israel) was chosen by God to continue the family of God's promises. A perfect man of faith? By no means! But 'warts and all', he saw through his immediate sorrows of death and loss to the hope of promise and new life.

Prayer from the Church of Scotland

Thank you God, for Your immeasurably big heart.

Where would we be without You?

Your resolve to never give up;

Your willingness to keep working to sustain the cosmos which You love. The ingenuity of Your mind is unfathomable!

How perfectly You set up all the ecosystems of earth, the balances of climate and vegetation and interdependent species.

How deep Your trust in us, to implant in us the wisdom to care for the land and the sea,

to be Your co-workers in ensuring the flourishing of all.

Dear God,

After all Your constant, faithful, unconditional commitment to us, there are times we want to escape You.

When we don't even know what gets in the way,
when our closed minds are a mystery to ourselves,
when our thinking gets clogged up with the pollution of self-hatred, please will You come and speak some gentle sense to us again.

When loving us is a thankless task,
and You watch our futile efforts to clean up our own act,
please will You prod us into noticing You,
willing us to reach out and grab Your hand.

God, You know the bitter taste of failure,
You fully understand the temptation to give up.

You stay with us and quell all those gremlins of defeatism
and pessimism and discouragement.

You have forgiven us for all that's gone wrong in our living
and loving.

In Christ's name we pray, **Amen**