

LET'S CELEBRATE CHURCH
21st JUNE 2015

Today we're going to celebrate Church, to say thank you to God for the way that He has blessed us, for His promises to be with us. We say thank you to God for one another and for the ways in which we can help and support one another; we'll share pizza and ice cream afterwards!

Read: Psalm 107:1

The Pop-up Tent!

I brought my pop-up tent. It is great; I can do all sorts of things with it; it shelters me from the sun when I sit in it, from the rain and the wind if I put it up right way and peg it down; it would blow away otherwise. I've got all kinds of things inside my pop-up tent: I've got a book to read, a bottle of water and some biscuits so that I have something to eat and drink; I've got a jumper in case it gets cold; other tents I could put my sleeping bag inside so that I could sleep in it; I've got some pots and pans so that I can make a fire and cook my tea. The great thing about my tent is that I can move it: I can pack up my stuff into a box, I can pick up the tent and move to the other side of the church.

Here is the story of someone who lived in a tent: listen out for the tents as Martin reads **Genesis 12:1-9**, the start of the story of Abraham.

Abraham lived in a tent with his family and had all kinds of things that he owned, pots, pans, animals, and so on. One day God said to Abraham "I want you to leave home and go to the place I will show you!" Well, that's tough; to go, but not telling Abraham where he's going, where that place is; so what's Abraham going to do? *Think about that for a moment.* God said some more: He made Abraham some promises: He promised Abraham that one day he would be part of a great nation, that He would be famous and that the whole world would be blessed by knowing Abraham and his story. So, with these promises in his head and his heart, what did Abraham do? Let's see:

Did God tell Abraham to go to the shops? (No!)
Did God tell Abraham to go to the park? (No!)
Did God tell Abraham to go to a new land? (Yes!)
Did Abraham say, 'Why?' (No!)
Did Abraham say, 'No'? (No!)
Did Abraham say, 'Yes'? (Yes!)

Abraham packed up his tent and off he went, to one place after another and everywhere he went, he built an altar, a place where he could pray and say thank you to God for being there and for being God. With his tent, he moved on; he built another altar. Everywhere Abraham went in his tent, God was there and God blessed Abraham and helped him and Abraham learned to trust God.

Here's two great things to celebrate about Church:

First of all, we are God's people and God has promised to bless us. He has promised to love us, to help us, to forgive us. He has promised to be with us; all of these promises come true for us in Jesus: because of Jesus God loves us and forgives us and saves us; because of Jesus God is with us. This is the first thing to celebrate about Church: we are God's people and God is with us. He is with us here on Sunday when we worship; He is with us in the Hall when we have pizza and ice cream; He is with us tomorrow at school, at work, at home, at the shops, playing in the garden; He is with us when life is hard.

Secondly, God has called us to serve Him, to live for Him. Our lives have a purpose and that is to love and serve the Lord Jesus, to be the kind of people He wants us to be and to love and serve others and to be a blessing to others. "Abraham left" and did what God wanted. Sometimes we get stuck in our own ways and forget this great calling to serve Jesus and love others. This is the second great thing about the Church: we are called to serve God and love other people.

Let's celebrate Church: we are God's people, He loves us, He's with us; He has called us to love and serve Jesus and other people. Fantastic!

Storms, lightning and Prayers

See the shapes on the screen: a lightning burst; black clouds; rain. These are all meant to speak about hard times in our lives and in other people's lives. Sometimes we think that these are times when God has left us and gone away, but God is really still there and we can pray. There is another tent story in the Bible, when the people are living in tents with Moses as the leader. There is one tent right in the centre every time they stopped, the tent where God lived. God was there.

Think of some places in the world where life is hard - pray for them; Nepal where people are suffering because of the earthquake; Syria where lots of people are refugees because of the war and live in fear of being part of that war. Many of them are living in tents; we pray that God will be there with them too.

Think of some people you know for whom life is hard - pray for them: it might be someone in hospital, or recovering from hospital; it might be someone who is sad because someone they love has died; it might be someone who is finding life hard at school, or at work, or someone who is feeling lonely.

I'm going to leave these pictures on the screen and we're going to pray for places and people and for the churches in these places and for God's love to surround them; we'll play a song quietly in the background that reminds us how big God is.

Music: Our God is a great big God

Following Jesus - Matthew 16:21-24

Walking is pleasant and relaxing; Last Sunday, we went for a walk along the river, and up to Woodhall Farm and it was a very pleasant time! Some walks are more difficult: walking to the top of Ben Nevis, and some people think that because there is a path all the way, it will be easy, but it is steep and then the cloud comes down, it starts to rain, the wind gets up, there's even snow on the ground and it gets really cold and the walk is hard! You need more than a pop-up tent there! It would not be big enough.

Jesus talked about walking to Jerusalem. It was not a pleasant Sunday afternoon stroll, but a determined journey; Jesus is going to Jerusalem with a reason to be there. He's going there to complete God's mission, to complete the reason for His coming into the world in the first place. He is going to die on the cross. He told Peter that and Peter was not happy; he told Jesus that it was a bad idea to go to the cross. Imagine! But Jesus was determined; He knew He must do it, otherwise the whole reason for His coming would be wasted. He had to go to the cross; He had to die; He had to be raised on the third day. He had to do it to be loyal to God, to obey God, to complete His mission in life. On Good Friday Jesus walked through Jerusalem on the way to the cross and it was hard: He fell over and had to be helped up, carrying part of His cross; people laughed at Him, and made fun of Him because He looked so

weak and frail. He walked to the cross and died on the cross and suffered because of His love and loyalty to God and because of His love for world, to be our Saviour. Thank God He walked way of the cross.

He calls us to walk the same way. Disciples are to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We want to walk sunny beaches with the sea lapping round our toes and everything is peaceful and quiet; we don't want to walk the dark streets of Jerusalem where it is dangerous and people laugh at us. But sometimes God calls us to walk hard paths, when our loyalty to Jesus is tested. Jesus wants us to be like Him, to put on the qualities we see in Jesus and if need be that is about getting rid of all the old ways that are wrong, bad and hurtful. To gossip, to tell lies, to swear at others; to be greedy, want money and possessions; we couldn't care less about life and other people. All of these are to be put off like a dirty set of clothes. Jesus said: "love God heart and soul; love your neighbour!" Loyalty to Jesus means living in a way that loves God and others; that puts away things that are wrong. He calls us to walk the way of the cross.

To Celebrate Church is a great thing to do. There are good news stories about groups that we're involved in, ways in which we have enjoyed these groups and church, ways in which God has blessed us, ways in which what we have done has been good and other people are blessed. We give thanks; we celebrate. Then as church we journey on into new days; we pack up our tent and look for new ways to serve God in our lives and in our community; we look to serve God in the future; that might mean walking the way of the cross, giving up things we're familiar with and have grown to love; it might mean the same people in new places. What is God calling us to be and to do? Jesus walked the way of the cross; He did it because He knew that He needed to do it; it was the only way to save the world and be a blessing to others. We want to be blessed by God; we also want to be a blessing to others around us; God goes with us everywhere we go. Will we be loyal to Jesus?