

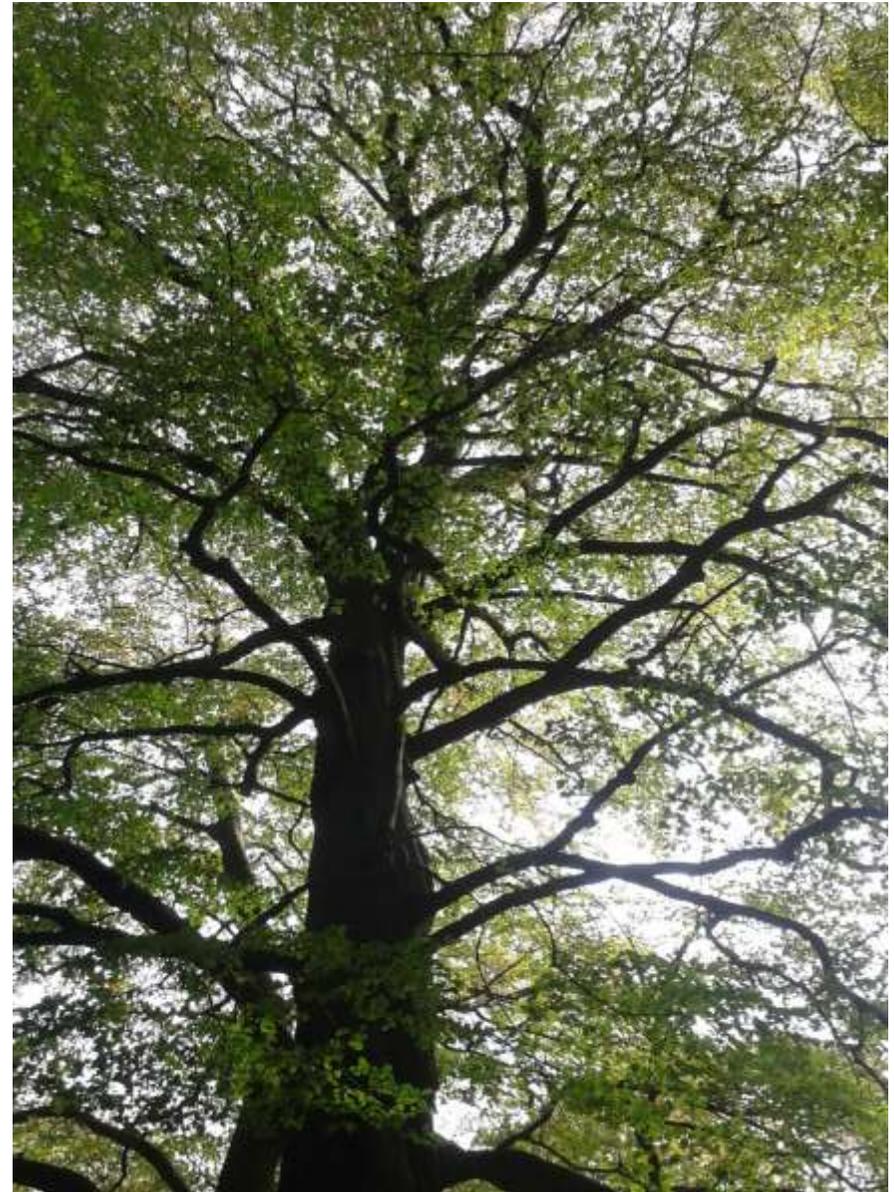
Preparation:

The readings set for this Sunday include:

- **Genesis 25:19-34**
- **Psalm 119:105-112**
- **Romans 8:1-11**
- **Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

1. You may want to read some or all of these readings before starting your worship – or include them after the first prayer.
2. When preparing for this worship, find a place and time where you can be quiet and comfortable for half an hour.
3. Put something that speaks to you of God's faithful love in a place where you can focus on it.
4. You can sing the hymns if you are able, or you can read the words out loud – or silently if that seems better. Alternatively you may find them on the internet
5. When you are ready, light a candle/tea light if it helps you to focus. This can mean many things to you. Perhaps you could use the words of Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
6. Now, sit down and relax...
7. Welcome to worship!

Order for worship on Sunday 12th July 2020



Worship for Sunday 12th July – at Central Hall

Notes for worship preparation are on the other side of this sheet.

Call to worship:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. **Psalm 119:105**

Hymn 164: Your words to me are life and health

Prayer: Lord we praise you for the simplicity and the complexity of your creation. We praise you for the sunrise and the vast depths of space. We praise you for breath and the Spirit within which gives us life. We praise you for your good gifts. Yet we are sorrowful, for sometimes we avoid the truth by being too simplistic and sometimes we pretend complexity when it suits us to avoid a simple truth. Forgive us our deceitfulness and bless us with your Grace. By your Grace our sins are forgiven and we are freed to love again. Thanks be to you O God! **Amen.**

Reading When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. *Genesis 25:27-28*

Reflection

The story of Isaac and Rebekah continues from last week's lectionary with this reading about the birth of his twin sons and favouritism in the family. As the twins grow up, Dad prefers Esau, the hunter, mum prefers Jacob, the quiet farmer. Dad likes the meat that Esau brings home, Mum prefers Jacob with his gentler more subtle ways. With such favouritism the family is far from perfect. I've seen a lot of families where there are favourites. It's so unfair. Favouritism echoes down the generations, and never more than in this case. Rebekah is told that the twins are going to be the fathers of two nations who will struggle against each other just as they struggled inside her before they were born. Perhaps the unfairness of favouritism contributes to Jacob's desire to steal Esau's birthright. Jacob sees Esau's weakness – Esau cannot be bothered to sort out his own food – and he demands Esau's inheritance in return for a bowl of lentil stew. Esau's hunger is not for a future inheritance, but for a full stomach. Perhaps, also, Esau relies on his father's favouritism and expects that he will overrule the deal the two brothers had made. That does not happen, and later, encouraged by his mum, Jacob deceives his father to steal Esau's blessing too. Where, then, is God in this story? Is it possible that this imperfect family could be chosen, by God, to bring the human family closer to comprehending the nature of

God? Can such a man as Jacob really become the founder of the Israelites? But it is this one, who has deceived and taken advantage of his family members, who eventually finds himself struggling with God for a blessing. And Jacob won't let go! He will not let go! Perhaps that was what he had been searching for all along – God's blessing, God's inheritance. At Peniel Jacob wrestles, he struggles, and he is wounded because of his great desire for inheritance and blessing. "I will not let go unless you bless me" he says to Almighty God. He leaves that encounter wounded and happy: limping and blessed!

The story of Abraham and Sarah, their children and descendants, is not a particularly pleasant story. It's about a somewhat dysfunctional family, but it is also a story about a family encountering the living God.

At Peniel Jacob recognises that he desperately wants God in his family and, despite his all too human ways, Jacob is determined to struggle to discover God's ways. The following day he is reconciled with Esau - who had wanted him dead. What can we make of this family history? There is hope for us here: Even when we, like the members of this family, go in the wrong direction, just a hint of going in the right direction – a movement of spirit, is enough for God to transform our lives. I have no need to wait until I'm perfect, or my family is perfect, God's desire to bless me, and my desire for God's blessing are sometimes all that is necessary. We are challenged to come closer to God, to wrestle with God – not politely and well-manneredly, as if we come from the perfect family, but like Jacob.

We come from a broken and fallen people. I am just like the next person, and sometimes the only lamp for my feet is my thirst for God's word. A desire for God's light to shine in my life, for the seed to fall in the soil of my heart. This is ultimately what really matters. I see it in the letter to Romans. "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:6).

Prayer: Lord God, don't ever let me ever give up my birthright from you for a bowl of stew! Your blessing and inheritance is worth so, so much more than that!

Hymn 611: Brother, sister, let me serve you

Prayers for the world. Pray for families where there are troubles and pray for those known to you who are struggling at this time. Pray for peace between nations that don't work together. Then pray the **Lord's Prayer**

Hymn 407: Hear the call of the kingdom

Blessing: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. **Amen**