

Lord God, as we ponder scripture, give us the wisdom of your Holy Spirit, to allow Jesus to shield us from danger, and remind us of your meaning in our lives. Amen.

- Ukraine, Climate change, refugees, even the Corona virus?
 - Do you find yourself wondering what God is up to?
- Struggling to make ends meet; worry about your family; a broken dishwasher?
 - Do you wish God would sort it out a bit quicker?
- It seems to me that God works in an obstinate and obstreperous way. He rarely seems to take the easy route and like a squirrel darting about hither and thither, there seems to be little order or planning about what he does.
 - He has his own inscrutable time schedule, and in these days of Amazon prime next day delivery, we do not like waiting.
 - He seems to deliberately head towards danger rather than do a risk assessment to keep everyone safe.
- All this seems bizarre and chaotic and nonsensical, but what I want to suggest today is that it is only when we start looking at things from God's perspective rather than our own, that it can even begin to make sense.
- Take the case of Abraham in our first reading.
- Abraham trusted God. He must have done! For heaven's sake he had upped sticks and left his native land because he felt God calling him. He had become rich with much cattle and belongings.
 - But he still had this aching void in his life. He and Sarah were unable to have children. How could God fulfil his promise of making him the father of a great nation if he didn't give him a son? What was God up to? *'But Abram said, 'O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?'*
- He wants a son and he wants him now. Abraham is looking at life from his own perspective. This is not surprising. He is after all, probably in his 80's. To conceive a son at that age would be an achievement in anyone's book! Abraham is talking rational sense and it seems God has his head in the clouds!
- And God, who has his head in the clouds, takes him outside and invites him to count the stars.
 - When did you last do that? Staring at eternity. Staring at the vastness of creation. Numbering the pinpricks of light. And wondering. And marvelling. It's mind-expanding! It never fails to bring peace in the midst of turmoil
 - Abraham is told, *'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be.'*
- Abraham thinks big and began to see things God's way. Turning to see things God's way, is repenting. That's the meaning of the word.
 - He got a glimpse of eternity rather than his own deadlines. He got a glimpse of life as bigger than just himself. He immersed himself in God's creation rather than his own small horizons as he stared at the beautiful Milky Way and he was able to believe God and trust in him.
- And the two biblical promises at the beginning of the reading came true, *'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield'*. God is there to be a protective shield. And he was. And he did! The role of his descendants, far into the future will be to steward and nurture the land God is giving them. The ground Abraham is standing on. *'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.'*
- Are you afraid at the state of the world today? Are you anxious about your own future? Or worse still, your children's future? Do you wonder what on earth God is up to?
 - Go and count the stars. And wonder. And marvel. And acknowledge that God made them. And see things through God's eyes rather than your own. And remember the promise. *'Do not be afraid'*. Probably the most common promise in the whole of the bible.

- And then allow yourself to trust in God and realise you are not alone in the vastness of life for God says. *'I am your shield'*. He is there to bring order and meaning to your life.
- That's what he did to Abraham, but Abraham still continued childless for at least another 15 years. That's a long time! That's God's time, not Abraham, and not our own!
- The story of Abraham is one of God allowing him to head into danger but of God protecting him with a shield of faith throughout it all. Like a mother hen protecting her chicks from danger by sheltering them under her wings.
- Do you think it felt like that to Abraham at the time? I doubt it, but with the benefit of hindsight and the ability to look at the whole story in God's time rather than the immediacy of our own time-ridden desires, it is clear that God was shielding him even in the 15 years of wait after the stars episode.
 - There are stories of hens caught in the middle of a burning farmyard who gather their chicks under their wings to save them by sacrificially giving up their own lives to the flames. After the fire the chicks are discovered alive under the charred remains of their loving mother.
- Jesus spoke of mother hens in our Gospel reading when he opened up about his own commitment to the people of Jerusalem. *'How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings'*,
- It could be said that Jesus works in obstinate and obstreperous ways as he deliberately heads towards Jerusalem after being warned that Herod is seeking him to kill him.
- Jesus went head first into danger and confronted evil head on, weeping for humanity who persisted in taking the short view and seeking their own interests instead of seeing things through God's eyes.
- Would Jesus be weeping for you? Are you able to see the world through God's eyes, through the wonder of creation or are you just disillusioned because you don't seem to be getting the answers you want?
- Wonder, as you watch Jesus gather his *'children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings'* as he opens his arms wide on the cross. Wonder and if you can, shout out, *"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."*
- And when you've discovered the wonder and let the shield of the mother hen protect you, do not be afraid, for after the fire comes new beginnings. After the cross comes resurrection.
- But if you're eagle-eyed rather than chicken livered, you may have noticed that I missed a few words out in-between these two quotes. It's important not to lose that note of unsettling challenge that comes from this morning's Gospel reading. It was not entirely comfortable to read, and I hope you did not feel entirely comfortable hearing it. It's those words in-between Jesus saying, *'How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings,'* and *"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."* that make the difference. Listen, and feel the discomfort! *'How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."*
- There is a feeling of God honouring and freewill and judging here. And if we insist on looking at the world through our own eyes instead of God's eyes, then we will think he isn't doing anything about it is absent or doesn't care or worst of all, doesn't really exist. We won't be willing to bring Jesus into our lives. God with his head in the clouds rather than his feet on the ground.
- Whatever worries you about the world at the moment: whether it's climate change or Ukraine or the huge disparity between rich and poor, or whether it's your own family, or your health or even your broken dishwasher, the same principle holds true.
- That's the purpose of our mission this summer. To allow God to be involved in the issues that world that bother us today, rather than relegating him to history.
 - So, go and count the stars in the sky if you are able and look at the world through God's eyes and not your own. And you'll see the difference that it makes.