

Expecting visitors.

March 1st, Lent 2.

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16, Romans 4: 13-25, Mark 8: 31-38

Have you walked along the footpath on Otakau Road?

It is hard to walk two abreast. One person either walks on the grass or walks ahead of the other.

Pathways are vitally important – they lead us towards our destinations and engage us with other people. As well as pedestrians, many assisted by walking sticks or frames, they find room for a variety of pets, they manage to take bikes and skateboards, roller blades and multi-wheeled baby transport – all for the most part successfully as we take our everyday life paths.

In post-war Vietnam a family was seen walking a narrow path. In their tradition the father of the family was first in the line followed by the mother and the children in order of seniority, boys first then girls. When they came to a section of the path where there were known to be landmines the order changed. The oldest girl – around 10 -12 years of age walked first followed some distance back by the other children then the mother and finally the father. At the end of the dangerous part of the track the order reversed to its original pattern with the father at the head of his family.

Our natural conclusion was that this was simply a cowardly act by the father, but in reality it was not so. As the breadwinner of the family upon whom all the others depended for their survival the father had to be protected. Then the mother was the second most important for obvious reasons. The children, especially the girls, were the least valuable in terms of the family's survival. The oldest girl's weight was closest to the mother's, so she was the logical choice to lead the way. There was no fuss or debate – it was accepted as necessary so it was done. Pathways tell us so much about life and how we walk them about our values and the people who accompany us and those we meet along the way.

Abram was asked by God to walk before God in a manner that showed respect. Abram fell on his face with awe. He was to be blameless and there was the promise that he would be exceedingly fruitful, the father of many nations and the father of kings. "Count the stars, for so numerous shall your offspring be," said God.

He was given a new relationship with God; a covenant. His new name 'Abraham' meant 'father of a multitude'. Sarai as well was to be part of this covenant, given a new name, 'Sarah', meaning 'princess'. She was to be the mother of nations; the mother of kings.

This couple became the ancestors of the three great monotheistic faiths – of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims.

Each faith has a star, ours is a five pointed star, the Star of Bethlehem. Abraham and Sarah are our ancestors in faith. Like Abraham and Sarah we believe in God and are gifted the grace of righteousness. You have a symbolic star. Stars generate light of every colour and radiate their brilliance in all directions. Reflect for a moment on the nature of your reflection – and on those around you, for we are more than a single star; we are a family of Christ-lights in the Church and the world.

Last week you were invited to place a stone as a Lenten symbol in the wilderness scene up here.

If you wish you may place your star – the symbol of God-created light within you - in the wilderness scene at some point during the rest of the service.

Last weekend 5 people from the parish went to the church in Russell with 5 people from the parish of Hillsborough. We were to be part of an Indaba process of groups in the diocese visiting other churches, making friends and getting an understanding of their ministry joys and challenges.

We are now to host the other two churches. This is earlier than originally planned as both the other churches misread the dates and have asked us to host them a week earlier than planned.

We can all help. The group arrive next Saturday at three pm. We will welcome them with our friendship and afternoon tea. At 3:30 there will be a short study time on one Old Testament story. From 4-5pm we will share who we are as a parish and community; looking at ministries based in the Church, the Hall and in the wider community.

At 5pm the team will drive around the Parish; going into the hospital grounds and seeing the new chapel site. The drive around will include the hospice, the mall, Milford beach and Castor Bay for a paddle and the schools.

By 5:45 the team are back and we are all invited to join them for a pizza meal. Please bring toppings, salads or desserts. After tea the billets will meet their particular team members. We will share some activities together and then go home.

Parishioners will provide bed and breakfast and conversation.

So the team can meet many of you there will be just the one service at 9:30 am.

Our visitors will help with the service.

After morning tea the visitors will walk up Fenwick Avenue via the lakeside to Milford school, I hope with the children to guide them, then back for lunch, a time of reflection and then they go home.

How do we help the other churches to get to know us?

What can we ask of them as we go through a time of change regarding getting a reliever and a new vicar? The Hillsborough Parish has just done this.

What are their needs?

They have just altered their hall and are moving back into their newly refurbished church.

There were no children at the Russell Church. How can we help to green their church with the gift of families. They wish to rebuild their ablutions block. Can we help them?

I wonder what we will learn from this experience.

I invite you - I urge you to come on both Saturday and Sunday to enjoy meeting new people and sharing with them the delights and challenges of our Parish life.