Genesis 12:1-4

Relationships are the bedrock of our lives. So, to extol good relationships, is to speak of an eternal truth, but one that is increasingly difficult to put into practice. Although our society is increasingly marked by selfishness, it is difficult to have even the briefest of encounter with a human being. The woman at the till in Aldi does say hello and goodbye, but she seldom has any time to say anything else, when you sit next to someone on the train they are in their own electronic world and so on. We have a way of life that does not build communities.

 But there is something else that makes people today even more alone. They have little or no relationship with God. They have no father to inspire and guide them, no brother to go ahead of them and protect them, no Holy Spirt to comfort them as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings ( Luke 13.35). How terrible and tormenting the fate of those left alone on this planet.

 Yet God would not have it so, for just as in the Trinity there is a dynamic relationship of three, who are yet somehow one. So God seeks to allow us into that relationship. God made himself know first to Adam and Eve and their descendants. Very few stories survive from before the time of Abraham. It is only then that we begin to see a figure, whose way of life, beliefs and life events can be checked against the evidence that we have been able to gain from this period. The evidence is not plentiful and the reason is quite simple. Abram was a transhumant pastoralist. That means he and his family roamed around the Middle East looking for pasture. To describe them as a family is a bit confusing for us, who think of a family as two people with one or two kids and the odd grandparent or two. No these are what most people would call a tribe, with a leader. That leader was Abrahams father, Terah.

 In our first reading, The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” Here we have one of those dramatic interventions, where people are going along doing nothing special when God suddenly turns up. Sometimes this is a vision, like with Paul, or a voice from heaven as in this case. And through this brief encounter, there is the opportunity to forge a new relationship. It is a relationship with no less than God, the creator and ruler of the universe. But as the dialogue develops, it is clear that this is a **personal** relation, with a **powerful God who promises** to change Abraham’s life radically. Abraham has just one thing to do on his part. He must leave his country, his kindred and the kitchen sink. (Well they didn’t actually have one, but it rhymes better than his father’s house.) Now a great many of us have done just that. We know that this process can be painful and it is not easy to live cut off from what is familiar and dear to our hearts. Even little things can make us feel lonely. So way back in 1974 I was in a Safeway supermarket in the US and I saw a tin of Heinz baked beans. I scooped it off the shelf and went home thinking of beans on toast. What joys awaited me. I opened the lid to see the familiar tomato sauce, poured the contents into a pan and with mounting excitement poured this food of the gods on my toast. But horrors awaited. The taste was not the same. And I a grown man began to weep. Isn’t it amazing how trivial things, matters of seeming no consequence remind us that we are far from home. But if God make a demand on Abraham he made plenty of promises to make up for the lack of the familiar. Listen to all these I wills and I shalls.

I will show you a land.. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

 6x I will another one implied and one shall. Now all the wills are for Abraham, but the shall is mind boggling. He is not only going to be the Father of the Jewish people , but the whole world is going to be blessed by him. Now how this works out is explained by Paul In our second lesson.

He like Jesus in the gospel reading often spoke to his fellow Jews. They tried to build a relationship with God by following his laws. But Paul like Jesus argues that this is not possible. We are not capable of living like God. God does not expect us to be able to find him or to understand his ways or to do things that impress him. He wants one thing and one thing only, a relationship based on trust – in other words faith. Then he expects us to be ready to follow him,, wherever it takes us. This is what Paul says here.

 As is sometimes the case with Paul it is not that easy to follow, so please look at the second reading and the third paragraph.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace **that is Gods love and mercy** and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law **the Jews** but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) .

 So then we and all who are in relationship with God through Christ are the children of Abraham.

In this morning’s service we will be privileged to hear something of the story of a group of young men from the Punjab in Pakistan. These men are like us, sons of Abraham and our brothers in Christ Jesus. They have come to Germany to enjoy the freedom to speak of Jesus Christ in your own city, the freedom to worship the God of their fathers , the same God who we worship this morning , the freedom from want by being able to allowed to enter higher education and the freedom from fear. The fear of your church being burnt down, of being beaten up on the street, or your sister being molested. Their situation is far from easy and we could be entering into a time like that of my fathers generation, when we must rise from our slumbers and self- centredness and confront evil. But whatever the future might bring to each of us, we must never forget the God who we worship and who reaches out to us is El \_Shaddai. The God of power.

 This time last week, I spoke to another young man from the Punjab, but someone from the Indian side of the border. He was born and raised in a devout Hindu family, who regularly visited the temples. But then his older brother became very ill. They took him everywhere, to lots of doctors and also various Temples. But he got worse and worse. Then a neighbour suggested they go to a Christian church. We are not going to worship foreign gods, said the father. But as the situation deteriorated they went t the church, where the whole congregation stood around him and prayed. Nothing happened, but then a few days later, he was hungry for the first time in months. So they went the next Sunday and again after a few days, something happened he was healed. The whole family became Christians. They were overwhelmed by the power of God. This young man is called Mata. He is very aware that to follow Christ is not easy and the situation there is getting worse, but he will follow Jesus and trust in his power. The power of God to transform is not one I have emphasized very much in my sermons, so I have thought a lot about Mata’s words this week and the Christian vision of a world blessed by Abraham and his descendants.

As Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, “That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation.” Or as Paul says, “If God is for us, who can stand against us.”