

April 22 nd	Genesis 29	52 How lovely is thy dwelling-place
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Today's hymn is the Scottish metrical version of Psalm 84, dating from 1650, but originally from the time of John Knox around 1564, just after the Scottish Reformation.

Brahms included this in his *German Requiem*, completed in 1868, the year the present Abbey Church was built. Brahms took longer to write his Requiem than it took to build the Abbey church!

Psalm 84 is in praise of God's 'courts' or 'house' ie the Temple. It may have been used on pilgrimage, in the days when going up to Jerusalem was every person's hope: perhaps every year, but for some people just once in a lifetime. The 'valley of Baka' means 'weeping', and reminds of the 'valley of the shadow' in Psalm 23.

The well-known reference to the nesting sparrow has echoes in Jesus' words about God caring for the 'birds of the air'. Unfortunately, it has also often been fulfilled in many a church building plagued by birds, eg the pigeons in Dirleton bell-tower or Abbey church loft!

The love of the Psalmist for the Temple is understandable, but for Christians, Jesus himself is the fulfilment of the Temple and its sacrifices (John 2:21). All the devotion which the Psalmist had for God's House is now due to God's Son.

1. How lovely is thy dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts, to me!
The tabernacles of thy grace
How pleasant, Lord, they be!
2. My thirsty soul longs vehemently,

Yea faints, thy courts to see:
My very heart and flesh cry out,
O living God, for thee.

3. Behold the sparrow findeth out
An house wherein to rest:
The swallow also for herself
Hath purchasèd a nest;
4. Even thine own altars, where she safe
Her young ones forth may bring,
O thou almighty Lord of hosts,
Who art my God and King.
5. Blest are they in thy house that dwell,
They ever give thee praise.
Blest is the man whose strength thou art,
In whose heart are thy ways.

Here is the metrical Psalm to the tune *Harington*:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyeCxB75_s

And here is Brahms' setting:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqpEYsOZymQ>

Today's reading is **Genesis 29**, *Jacob marries Rachel*
Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well. Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?" "We're from Harran," they replied.

He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?"

"Yes, we know him," they answered. Then Jacob asked them,

"Is he well?" "Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

"Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered.

Water the sheep and take them back to pasture."

"We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."

While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd. When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.

As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood."

After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be."

Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."

Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her."

So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."

And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave

me this one too." So she named him Simeon.

Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi. She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

This story is one of trick and counter-trick between Jacob and Laban. Perhaps as it was told, it would also have been a story of the rivalry of Israel and the Arameans, their neighbour to the north ('Syria'). It leads us into the births of the 'twelve sons' (tribes) of Jacob (ie Israel).

Jacob had come for Rachel, but with no gifts as a dowry for her. Laban tricks him by asking him to work seven years for Rachel's hand, and then substitutes his other daughter Leah on the wedding night. To have Rachel's hand in marriage, Jacob now has to work another seven years! It is poetic justice: Jacob the 'twister' is now himself the victim of a trick, and is as blind to the identity of the two sisters as Isaac his father had been to his two sons, Jacob and Esau. He also had to learn the rights of the firstborn- something he had denied his older brother Esau. Jacob is being taught a lesson, the hard way.

The abiding lesson for us is about how we treat our neighbours, and what hospitality we offer to travellers and visitors. Jacob and Laban were from neighbouring yet different nations, who would not always get on well in later history (think of Israel and Syria down the ages). Jesus used the example of another neighbour of Israel to show us how to love our neighbour- a Samaritan.

Prayer from Susan Brown, former Moderator

We bless Your name, Lord Jesus.

With open hearts, minds and spirits, we gather to praise You
grateful that Your arms are thrown so wide in welcome.

It is in the security of that embrace that we confess
we do not deserve such warmth or acceptance.

We have let You down in so many ways.

we have failed to reflect Your goodness
in the words we have spoken.

In the way we have treated others
and in the selfish things we have done.

We ask for Your forgiveness - but more than that.

We ask for the courage to choose to do better.

Help us to remember every minute of every day,
that we are Yours, loved by You, called by You.

Let that love and that calling makes us generous
towards others and more loving towards You.

Be Lord of our lives, this day and forever.

When things happen that we find hard to deal with;
when our head goes down and our eyes see no further than

our own feet, help us to be honest with You
even if it's through tears or rage

and ride the storm with us.

Help us to trust You're there

even when we cannot see or feel You close

then gently tilt our faces to look into Yours

to find there limitless compassion,

endless understanding and patience

and the courage we need to begin again.

We bring to You those who carry forever in their hearts,

the pain of losing a child...

we bring to you those who have coped with the suicide of a loved one....and all those who mourn...

Speak into each life, we pray, to bring strength and courage and to re-ignite the flame of hope....

In Christ's name, Amen.

A prayer from the Moderator for the coronavirus

emergency: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/a-prayer-from-the-moderator-amid-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

At 7pm tonight, you are invited to join our fellow Christians in North Berwick & District Association of Churches, in this prayer:

For all that is good in life, thank you,

For the love of family and friends, thank you,

For the kindness of good neighbour and Samaritan stranger, thank you.

May those who are vulnerable, hungry or homeless, experience support,

May those who are sick, know healing,

May those who are anxious or bereaved, sense comfort.

Bless and guide political leaders and decision-makers, with wisdom,

Bless and guide health workers and key workers, with strength and well-being, Bless and guide each one of us, as we adapt to a new way of living.

And may the light shining from our windows, across road and wynd, glen and ben, kyle and isle, be reflected in our hearts and hands and hopes.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, **Amen.**