

# Abraham Friend of God - Abraham, the Generous Host

by J. Glyn Owen

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*Abraham's story teaches us about the importance of faith, trust, and obedience in our relationship with God, and how God's presence in our lives can be a catalyst for spiritual growth and transformation.*

**Duration:** 46:33

**Scripture:** Genesis 18:1-8, Genesis 18:14, Genesis 18:16-33, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Abraham"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Genesis chapter 18 and highlights three scenes. The first scene depicts Abraham as the host and Jehovah as his guest. Abraham goes above and beyond to show hospitality to the three men, not realizing that they are actually God in human form. This scene emphasizes the importance of obeying God's commands and honoring our covenant with Him. Abraham's willingness to offer the best he has sets the stage for a deeper fellowship with God.

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## Transcript

And if you have your Bibles with you, I think you will find it useful to keep them open today. I'm not going to be referring to the Scriptures now at the beginning, but we shall be referring to various passages as we proceed, and you'll find it useful to have the Word of God open. Now our subject this morning, Abram friend of God, Abram the generous host.

Following upon the appearance of God as El Shaddai to Abram and the establishment of his covenant with him and his seed as recorded in the last chapter, verse 7 of chapter 17, then the designation of the covenant sign of circumcision, and some indication given to Abraham of the covenant responsibility that was his, namely the responsibility of obedience, Abram's name was changed to that of Abraham, and Sarai's name was changed and she became Sarah. That is another way of saying that chapter 17 represents a very distinctive milestone in the spiritual pilgrimage of this couple, Abram, Abraham now, and Sarah. Then came the further reiteration of God's promises that Sarah would be the mother of a son.

God repeats himself so many times because of our lack of capacity to take in what he says. Many of us should be grateful for that. The Word of God came to an Old Testament prophet the second time.

It comes to some of us many times over before we really take it in. Well, he repeated over and over again the fact that Sarah, Abram's wife, was to be the mother of a son. You have it again in chapter 17, verse 17, to which Abram responded very much as he responded before.

Lord, he says, don't, don't take the trouble. Now we've got this boy Ishmael from Hagar. Why not let Ishmael be the one in and through whom your purposes are going to be fulfilled? Now we have that at the end of chapter 17.

Because it is so similar to what has happened many times before, we are not going to deal with that in detail. Notice the principle. It is a feeble man, a man whose faith is as yet not fully formed, though a very genuine phenomenon.

He suggests to God something less than what God had originally promised. God says, not on your life. I have a blessing for Ishmael.

And God tells him that Ishmael will be blessed indeed. But says the Lord, I've not changed my mind. You're thinking that every day is making it more and more impossible for Sarah to be the mother of a child.

Well, just trust me. Now we move over into chapter 18. And here we see God's continued determination to bless these two.

God's continued determination to fulfill his original purpose. He will not take their alternatives to what he has promised. On the contrary, he will persevere with them.

And he will repeat his promises over and over again. And he will do this, that, and the other. Until finally his word penetrates not only Abram's soul, but Sarah's soul.

And they are one in confidence and one in faith. And forward they go as man and woman united in faith and in obedience to their God. We have a persevering God.

And herein lies our salvation, of course. We are fickle. We are faulty.

We would fall by the wayside a thousand times. Herein lies our salvation, that our God perseveres with us. Now what happens here in chapter 18 is something very unique.

There's a mystery here, and I cannot, I can't allay the mystery, and I don't want to attempt to be taking it away. It's the mystery of God appearing in human form. In the form of three apparently human beings, whom Abraham addresses at one time as three people and at another time as one person, the Lord.

You read the passage through and you will see how he oscillates and the passage oscillates. Sometimes the Lord replies in the plural, the three of us. At other times he replies in the singular, I will do this or I will do that.

It is as if the triune God appears to Abram here in physical form before the incarnation, indicating something of his greatness and something of his glory. Was it, I ask the question, was it not a pre-intonation of the fact that our God, our Godhead is a trinity? Now there are mysteries there and we can't go into them. We need to bear in mind that the glorious end of all this, however, was that God was wanting to call these two into an ever deeper fellowship with himself.

Not just to be the recipients of his favor or favors, but having received his favors and being the objects of his grace to enter into fellowship with him, into communion with him. And that's really what God is aiming at. God's commands, for example, are never arbitrary.

When he has entered into covenant with men and told them what to do, this is the way of obedience. His commands are never arbitrary. They're always a means to an end and the end is this, fellowship with him in this life and in the world that is to come.

Now this chapter reveals something of that. May the Lord enable us to get hold of it and for the truth to get hold of us. There are three scenes in this chapter and we're going to look at them in turn.

In the first scene Abraham is host and Jehovah is Abram's guest. Now that's what we have in verses one to eight. Now I want us to notice two main things here.

First of all, I want you to look at the stranger at Abram's door. Let me read verses one and two. The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and he bowed low to the ground. Thus does the Lord appear in the form of three men standing in typical oriental fashion and not bursting into Abram's tent until invited.

Now we cannot dogmatically affirm at what stage Abram recognized that these were not simply three men but here is the Lord who has come down. We can't say when, at what stage, but one thing is most certain. He did so recognize the three.

He recognized that God, the great God of glory who first spoke to him in his native Ur of the Chaldees had come down to meet with him and to converse with him. You see that it is possible of course that Abram's initial response was just a kind of common courtesy. And whether that is so or not, sooner or later it dawned upon him that here was the Lord himself speaking to him.

Now my impression is that when Abram addressed the group as my Lord in verse 4, whether it be in the singular or the plural, he probably recognized the divine in the human. In consequence, Abram is consciously acting from that point forward as the host to Adonai, the Lord of the universe, the Lord God of the universe. And he is therefore offering service to not three men, not just ordinary three guests that have come his way, but he is deliberately and he is positively offering everything that he can as a good host deliberately to the Lord come among or come to them in the form of three humans.

I sometimes wonder whether our Lord Jesus Christ didn't have this text and this passage in mind when he said in John chapter 8 and verse 56, your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. And he saw it and was glad. Wasn't this the occasion when father Abraham beheld the Lord Jesus in his pre-incarnate form along with the other two, apparently two humans at the tent of his door.

Blessed is he who with the eye of faith has learned to recognize the Lord coming to him even in the guise of hungry, thirsty, weary stranger standing at the door. The stranger at the door. Now, the next thing I want you to notice is the service of Abram's or from Abram's heart, the service of the heart, recognizing the guest extraordinary.

And I will now speak of him in the plural, in the singular. Abraham's service assumes a corresponding uniqueness. It's not only lavish and freely offered, but it is offered as the service of the heart.

Now there is something to be distinguished here. See what Abram is doing here is not obeying any known command. There was no command that when the Lord would come to Abram, Abram should receive him in any, in any particular way.

There was no specific command of God that covered this particular experience. So what Abram is doing here is this. He's, he's obeying the impulse of his heart and of his spirit.

And there is nothing more revealing than that. How do you react? How do I react when there is no known commandment that relates to the issue concerned? What does my heart say? What does my heart want to do? What does my spirit want to do? How do I react when there is no known commandment? That's what we have here. It's not the service that Abram will render in accordance with any known commandment, but it's the service of the heart.

And what a service it is. He actually invites Abraham and the three to stay behind just to have what he calls a morsel of bread or a pinch of bread as someone has translated it, and to wash their feet and rest under the tree. Now that was a very simple thing, but you notice what happens.

No sooner have they agreed to stay with him for a moment than he goes or rather sends his servant to kill the fatted calf and then he begins to make a big feast. Have you got the point? Inviting the three visitors to stay for a piece of bread, Abram went to kill the fatted calf. Once they had agreed to stay for a snack, Abram insisted on preparing a feast.

An American author puts it like this, it is as if he got them to join him for a hamburger. Then where the hamburgers appeared, he's gone to cook a turkey with all the trimmings. Well, that's the American way of putting it.

Sorry if there are many Americans here this morning, but that's the American way of putting it. But he's right. It's hitting the nail on the head.

The only thing he promised was a morsel of bread and a provision to wash your feet and have a little rest in this weary wilderness. But Abram wanted to do much more. Meaning, you see, by this time he was aware that the three standing before him were unique.

Uncommon, unusual, the great Jehovah God come down. Now there in its stark simplicity is the vestige of the vestibule into the inner sanctuary of fellowship with God. We cross the threshold only when we have learned to obey God's commands as taught in chapter 17 and to honor our covenant engagements as taught there and elsewhere, but also when our hearts will honor him with the best we've got whenever he comes and however.

Neither has that principle been abrogated. The ascended Lord still comes as he says to us in the book of the revelation, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him and sup with him and he with me, we'll eat and drink together.

We're fellowship together. God will only deal familiarly with those who have learned to recognize him and to render him not only obedience to his commandments, but the service of the heart. The kind of experience that takes place in the rest of the chapter is impossible until we have found grace to be willing

hosts of our Lord, whether he comes to us by his word, by his spirit or through a stranger standing at the door in need.

The service of the heart. My friends, have we ever moved on to this higher ground of spirituality? If there were no commendable that told you not to sin, would you refrain for God's sake? If there were no commandment that required you to do something, would you do it just out of your heart? That's the test of the man. And this is the way to fellowship, when the heart is as big as the demand of the law.

In the second scene, the divine guest becomes the guarantor of his earlier promises and the human host becomes the recipients of his massive reassurances. God is no man's debtor. They who delight to serve him and joyfully offer him their choicest substance as Abram did, will find that they simply cannot be losers.

Lose and you gain. Give and you get. You cannot lose when you sacrifice to the Lord.

Whilst Abram had been thus engrossed in rendering heart service to the Lord, the same God himself was actively at work. And I want you to notice two things in which God is seen at work in this fellowship. First of all, we see God hastening the fulfillment of his promises, bringing it nearer, bringing the fulfillment almost, almost there.

Look at verse 10. Then the Lord said, I will surely return to you this time next year. And Sarah, your wife, will have a son.

Now we're on the same point again. And some of you may want to say, well this is repeating and repeating. Yeah, but you see, it's because the people couldn't take it in.

And the fact is that you and I too do not take in the principle involved in God's promises. We need to hear it repeated that it may sink into our subconsciousness and become part of us. Now notice what God is doing.

God now puts a date on it. Until now he had said generally, you will be a mother, you will have a son, and said certain other things, but it was general. But at this point in the fellowship that he's been having with Abraham, God has caused the wheels of his providence and of his purposes to move much faster.

And he says, right, one year hence and I'll be back and the child will be born in due course. The point I want you to notice is that the season for the fulfillment of God's promises ripens to a point of fruition whilst Abraham or you or myself are given to the willing service of our Lord. God's timing of events, you see, is so different from ours.

He doesn't use the same clock or the same calendar or diary. It's difficult for us to get used to this. We think that God is going to do something on October the 31st or November the 1st or whatever.

God doesn't use our calendars. The calendar is just something that helps meet our weaknesses as human beings. We are creatures of day and night and we need to have the break in between and to distinguish between them.

Morning and evening are ordinances that cater only for our creaturely requirements. The time piece that governs divine action is moral and spiritual. God acts according to the prevailing moral and spiritual conditions.

He had an illustration of it back in Genesis 15 when he spoke about the children of Israel ultimately possessing the land of Canaanites of Canaan and the Amorites will be dispossessed. But he told Abraham it can't just happen now because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And in fact it can't happen for a long time because my children, the children of Israel, not yet born as a nation, they will have to be in Egypt for 400 years because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full and I will not dispossess the Amorites until they have sinned away their right to live as a nation.

But then it will come and I will send my people in to dispossess them and even to slaughter them. For they will have sinned away their right to life. God said that.

But the same goes, you see, the same goes on the other side of the coin. I know some of us may not like to be told this because it puts some responsibility on us. Peter tells us that we can even hasten the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's in 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 12. That we can hasten his coming. How? By doing the things that he requires of us before he returns.

That's not my subject this morning but it's the principle of it. God's purpose is hasten, you see. The summer is coming.

The buds are coming. We can see them. And the flowers are appearing on the scene.

It's springtime. The summer is coming. The harvest time is coming.

When we are in fellowship with him. Giving him the service of the heart as well as the obedience to his commands that he requires. We see then God hastening the fulfillment of his promises whilst in fellowship with Abram.

We see God actively at work in dealing with a doubter of his promises. Now it is evident that the general thrust of the passage that however clear and bright Abram's faith remained during the intervening years, that of Sarah had neither come to birth or if it had come to birth it had grown or if it had grown it had receded again and suffered an eclipse. We cannot dogmatize which is correct.

But the fact of the matter is this that at this point in time she was spiritually an unbeliever as far as the fulfillment of God's promise of a son was concerned. And the divine three set the stage with a view to exposing her unbelief in order to create real faith in her heart. Where is your wife Sarah? They asked Abram.

There in the tent he said. And the Lord said, notice moving now to the singular I. I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah your wife will have a son. Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent which was behind him the speaker.

You know God is a wonderful stage manager. We've said that many times before but it is never more wonderful than it is here. And never it is more evident than it is here.

He has a lesson to teach Sarah but Sarah hasn't come face to face with him. Sarah hasn't shown her face yet. She is diffident, quiet.

She keeps inside the tent and they haven't met yet. But God will teach her a lesson. Oh he sets the stage.

You know what he does? He talks with Abram outside the tent. But he talks loud enough for the message to get through to Sarah. You see this wasn't a house this was a tent.

And God raises his voice loud enough so that dear old Sarah in her unbelief can hear what he is saying to her husband outside. And of course it had disadvantage. When you are not facing the person that is speaking to you you are quite uninhibited in your response.

You see you say something to me well I will keep a straight face as best I can and not show you my feelings. But if I am behind the tent or if I am behind a door I may make terrible grimaces. And I may say something quietly to myself that you wouldn't hear.

And that was the point here. This is the setting of the stage. God wanted Sarah to reveal her unbelief somehow or other.

So he said to Abram Abram I am coming back in a year from now and your wife Sarah will have a son not just a child a son. And Sarah overheard the announcement that she would bear a son a year hence. You remember what she did? She did exactly what Abram did in the last chapter.

Though there may have been some difference. She laughed. She laughed to herself and then said inwardly now mark you she didn't do anything outwardly.

Nobody ever heard a chuckle. She laughed inwardly and then she said within herself after I am worn out and my master is old will I now have this pleasure? That was a laugh of sheer incredulity and thus of cross unbelief. Though she may not have acknowledged it to Abram whom she loved and respected she was still a veritable unbeliever as far as the fulfillment of this promise was concerned.

Looking back over the record you will have realized that God had had very little intimate personal dealings with Sarah. Sarah had heard of the plan to leave her of the Chaldeas from Abram. Sarah had heard of the God of glory through Abraham and she believed as far as she had believed.

And she responded as far as she had responded. But now God is drawing nearer. She hears his voice outside the tent.

And she hears him repeat to Abram that he is coming back in a year's time and he puts a date to it now. And she's going to be the mother of a son. And I can almost hear Sarah now, the scriptures don't say this, but I can almost hear Sarah say he really means it.

He really means it. He said it so often and now he puts a date to it. Is anything too hard for the Lord? That was the question.

And somehow or other something is happening in her soul. Now the Genesis narrative doesn't tell us what. Do you know the Bible is a complete book.

The Holy Spirit inspired the author of the epistle to the Hebrews to fill in the blank here and to tell us what exactly went on where the Genesis record is silent. Listen to this. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive even when she was past the age.

And these are the words. Since she considered him faithful who had promised. Hallelujah.

Why did God arrange the stage like this? So that Sarah could hear the reiterated promise of her covenant God and hear it to a point where it created faith in her and she believed and conceived. Thus does the divine guest, the three in one, become guarantor of his promises. And the human host of the heavenly visitor finds his partner's spiritual conditions for the fulfillment of the promises are now fulfilled.

Abra and Sarah become united in a new way in faith expecting. By that virile faith in God Sarah received strength to conceive. Now you simply cannot miss the development here.

The development of the theme in this chapter. What began as a single incident of a God fearing man offering hospitality to what appeared to be three people, three humans, led on to his action as the delighted host of Jehovah God. When God is guest of a home and served with delight by one member, especially when that member is the head of the home, the wheels of his purposes move faster.

The fulfillment of his early promises grow nearer and nearer. Difficulties in the way are sorted out. Blind eyes are made to see.

Hard hearts of unbelief are made the breeding ground of faith. Something happens and Sarah believed. The third scene is as magnificent, indeed, if it is not the capstone of everything.

From verse 16 to 33, I didn't read it all. In this third scene, God communes with Abram as friend with friend. Abram appears as the friend of God and God as the friend of Abram.

And within this friendship, properly so-called, they commune. I think this is the high watermark in the biblical exposition of the kind of familiarity which may characterize God's dealings with his obedient children. He shares his secrets with Abram, his human friend, his trustworthy friend.

And in principle, of course, this is what Jesus talked to his disciples about when he said, you, he says, are not just disciples of mine. You're not just followers of mine. You, he says, are my friends.

Almost an echo of this passage. You are my friends if you do what I command you, an echo of 17.1, Genesis 17.1. I no longer call you servants because a servant doesn't know his master's business. Instead, I have called you my friends for everything that I learned of my father, I have made known to you.

Now this friendship with God is the most priceless privilege given to any man this side of heaven. And Abram, the obedient man of faith, who delighted to serve his God, enjoyed certain features of that loftiest of all lofty gospel experiences. The apostle James refers to Abram's designation as the friend of God.

And so he was. That was no hyperbole. Old Testament saints knew that Abram had a special relationship with God.

Jehoshaphat, in his prayer to God, speaks of Abraham, your friend. He's speaking to God in 2 Chronicles 20 and verse 7. While the prophet Isaiah records that the Lord himself spoke of Abram as my friend, Isaiah 41 and 8. Now let's look at it. That is the level of experience which is reflected in the last scene in this great chapter.

Two things I want you to notice. God tells his friend Abram of the pain in his heart. He speaks as friend with friend.

God tells him of the pain in his heart. When the men got up to leave, they looked down towards Sodom and Abram walked with them to see them on their way. Then the Lord said, now listen to this, shall I hide

from Abram what I'm about to do? Abram will surely become a great and powerful nation and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.

For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just so that the Lord will bring about for Abram what he has promised him. Then the Lord said, the outcry, and here is the pain in his heart, the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.

We shall not go into details. There is no time. We shall confine ourselves to the simple fact that the great El Shaddai at that point opens his heart to his human friend and object of his grace and told Abram of the pain and the displeasure that was his because of the report he had heard about Sodom and Gomorrah.

God was hurt. And then he proceeds to tell Abram something quite remarkable. He says, just to make sure that things are as bad as they are, I'm going down to double check.

Now of course, you good people, I know some of you are ready to shout at me and say, well look, surely that's not true of God. He doesn't need to double check. Of course he doesn't.

But Abram didn't know that. The awareness of the omniscience of God may not yet have percolated into his soul. And God wants to make doubly sure to Abram whatever is going to happen in Sodom and Gomorrah.

And Abram, remember, had a nephew there a lot. Whatever is going to happen there is going to be done because Sodom and Gomorrah are sinners greater than all the people of creation. And so God says in human language, he says, I'm going to double check.

Lot was there. Abram knew it. He was not only living there, but he was a city counselor.

And this is the time when we're thinking of city counselors. He was a city counselor in Sodom. Can you see what God is doing? He's not simply acquainting Abram his friends of his plans, but he's actually inviting Abram, his friend, to do something about his nephew Lot by asking him, the great almighty friend, divine, whether there's nothing he can do about Lot in Sodom.

God is going through all this because he wants to create greater faith and deeper confidence in Abram's heart and bring it all out into communion with himself, that Abram should ask something. In the last part, the second part of the last scene, Abram tells his divine friend of the problem in his mind. You don't tell everything to a stranger, do you? But to a friend you do.

Here we are right at the heart of the kind of spiritual intercourse which Christian fellowship with God can involve. And the scene is sublime. We notice Abram's boldness in asking a question about the propriety of the proposed divine action.

We're told about it in the rest of the chapter. Abram realized that God was going to judge Sodom and Gomorrah. The men turned and went towards Sodom.

Then Abram approached him and said, will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Now here's the problem. What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you, says Abram. Far be it from

you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike.

Far be it from you, he says, will not the just of all the earth do right? I have too much confidence in you, says Abram. You will not go into Sodom and destroy the whole place when there are fifty righteous men in it? You will not destroy it in immediate punitive judgment upon it and make no distinction between those that are yours and those that are not? Abram's concern is evident. The questions he asked revealed clearly the problem that emerged in his mind as he heard the unraveling of God's secret purposes in the moment of delectable fellowship.

Then you notice Abram's reticence. This is the reticence that is born out of respect of friend for friend, especially for God. Abram's reticence in asking for anything that would be inconsistent with God's glory.

Daringly yet humbly, Abram asked whether things were really as bad in the cities concerned that they had to be destroyed? Could they not be spared if only ten righteous souls were found? He started off with fifty. He thought if there are fifty righteous souls, then must the place or places be destroyed? But ultimately he came down to ten. Could they not be spared for ten? And God says, yes, yes.

He says, if only there are ten righteous souls found in Sodom and Gomorrah, I will restrain my indignation a while. When assured by God that they would be spared if only ten righteous souls were found in them, Abram did not go any further. Why did he not for this reason? He recognized that God was as merciful as he was just.

He now knew that the mercy of God was no less than his justice, and he would not ask for anything specifically, lest he would appear to be more concerned for the safety of a few mortal sinners than the glory of the immortal God of all creation. So you notice that this prayer ends, this communion, this fellowship, ends with a semi-climax. Abram does not ask anything.

I have heard people referring to this as Abram's intercession. Well, now Abram does not ask for anything. Now I want to stress, we did not hear Abram ask for anything.

Someone will ask whether anything tangibly emerged out of that extraordinary experience of rich fellowship with God, especially when Abram did not make an apparent request. I want to reply to the question by saying that the same God who heard Sarah's laugh of unbelief in her heart inside the tent also heard Abram's prayer of faith in his heart and answered it. You say to me, what biblical passage can you quote to prove that? Well, I can do so.

I am happy to say. I read in chapter 19 and verse 29 these words, So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abram. Hallelujah.

He remembered Abraham. And he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived. Have you got it, my friend? Abram did not put his prayer into the form of a formal petition.

We did not hear him say or ask anything. He was too afraid that he would appear to be more concerned about stupid Lot than the glory of the incorruptible God of all the earth. But he was concerned, and God knew that concern, and God read that concern, and God took that concern as a request.

And when he went down to judge the cities of the plain, he remembered Abram. And because he remembered Abram, he saved Lot. Men and women, you and I have some Lots in our families, maybe.

Men and women that have got entangled with Sodom. Fellows and girls that have got mixed up in Gomorrah. Some of them are in high places.

And the judgment of God is about to come upon the cities of the plain in our twentieth century. What can we do? I tell you, keep your covenant engagements. Be obedient to the word of the covenant.

And more, learn by the Spirit and the word of God and the fellowship of God's people. Learn to please Him from the heart. Always to give Him the benefit of the doubt.

Always to give Him what is highest and best. Always to give Him the whole of your heart's love and the whole of your heart's devotion. Do that, and I'll tell you what, you will find that your prayers have a strange way of influencing the course of the universe.

When the fire and the fire will rejoice in the presence of God because you were a man or a woman in fellowship with God. Covenant, men and women, let us live up to our heritage. Oh Lord, our God, we thank you for your word.

And we pray that you will forget us, forgive us, that we forget that you are so great and yet so gracious. Help us to see the highway to the summit of Christian communion in this passage today and to walk its way as it is further outlined and added to in the pages of Holy Writ. May we follow the signposts.

May we find our delight to do the will of God in all things through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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