

Sunday 16th August - 2020 Readings and Sermon

1st Reading: Genesis 45 v1-15

Joseph Makes Himself Known

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

"Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'

“You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. Tell my father about all the honour accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.”

Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 15 v10-28

Things that make a person unclean

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?” He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed

and suffering terribly.” Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

“Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Sermon by Rev’d Kelvin Woolmer: Genesis 45 - The Context

I will summarize at length the background of this encounter between Joseph and his brothers, because understanding the background is essential to understanding the encounter. The story is familiar, which means that we *think* that we know it. However, a careful recap will reveal details that we have forgotten—or, perhaps, we’ve never noticed.



This meeting of Joseph with his brothers has its roots in *Chapter 37*, where we learned that ‘Israel’ (Jacob’s new name) loved Joseph more than all his children, because (Joseph) was the son of his old age. And to show how much he favoured Joseph his father (Israel), had made (Joseph) a coat of many colours. We’ve all seen the stage show or film, and know the songs don’t we?!



His brothers saw that their father loved (Joseph) more than all his brothers, and they hated (Joseph), and couldn't speak 'peaceably to him' (37 v3-4)

Joseph of course doesn't take into account his brothers feeling of animosity to him, and happily tells them about his dream, the one where his brothers' sheaves bowed down to his sheaf (37 v5-8)



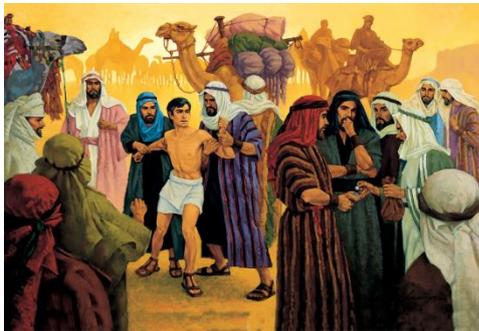
And then he tells them another dream where "the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me" (37 v9) He tells the first dream to just his brothers, who 'hated him all the more for his dreams and for his words' (37:8) He tells his second dream to his brothers **and** father (37 v10) His father rebuked him for the obvious symbolism that the father, mother, and brothers would bow down to Joseph (37 v10), but 'his brothers envied him' (Joseph) (37 v11) - and who could blame them?

If we remember that when Israel was known as Jacob he was spoilt by his mother, and disliked his brother and cheated him out of the family inheritance and now here he is spoiling his youngest son and almost willingly setting the older eleven boys against the younger, spoilt son. IS this the plot of an EastEnders series or what?



The brothers, in their hatred, when they were on a trip away from their family HQ, decided to kill Joseph (37 v20), but one of the brothers called Reuben, persuaded them to throw Joseph in a pit instead— incidentally it was a pit with no water, so although Reuben might have had a touch of the seconds about actually murdering his youngest 'spoilt' brother, he

wasn't exactly giving him an opportunity to enjoy a long and fruitful life was he?



Judah, another brother, persuaded them to sell Joseph to the members of a passing caravan and to tell their father; who we know as Israel but was also known as Jacob, into believing that Joseph; his favourite son, was dead (37 v25-35) Then the people who were in the camel caravan sold (Joseph) into Egypt to a man called Potiphar, who was the captain of the guard to Pharaoh.



This led to Joseph being a servant in the house of Potiphar. He refuses to sleep with Potiphar's wife and she then makes up the trumped up charge of attempted seduction against Joseph. Then this false charge results in Joseph's imprisonment (39 v1-20) And it's at this point that the Bible tells us ***'But Yahweh was with Joseph, and showed kindness to him, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison'*** (39 v21) – ***'and that which (Joseph) did, the Lord made it prosper'*** (39 v23)

Wow; *now* God is favouring Joseph. Not exactly been overtly helping out to much so far Lord - hated by his brothers; threatened with murder by his brothers; sold into slavery with some guys who own camels; then sold again into more slavery to the guy who is basically the head of security for the Pharaoh of Egypt; then accused of trying to seduce the same man's wife; and now he's in prison on a trumped up charge - NOW God favours him?! It's at times like these, when we've been through stuff in our lives that has really pulled us down; when everything we do turns to 'mush'; when relationships get all

mangled up and we get burnt out; when we have nothing left in ourselves to keep going. It's at that moment that we need God, and guess what?, when we are at our neediest, God will be there for us. When we have no other agenda, and we just need picking up and a metaphorical cuddle, that's when God is with us.



Then Pharaoh imprisoned his cupbearer and his baker 'into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound' (40 v3) Each of the men had a dream, which Joseph interpreted

to mean that the cupbearer would be restored to his office but the baker would be executed (40 v5-19) These dreams were fulfilled exactly as Joseph interpreted them (40 v20-23) Which is kinda 'good news/bad news' result depending on if you're the cupbearer or the baker isn't it?

Two years later, Pharaoh dreamed about seven sleek and fat cows and seven ugly and thin cows as well as seven plump and good ears of grain and seven thin and blighted ears - dreams which **his wise men could not interpret** (41 v1-8)

When the cupbearer (who is now out of prison and returned to his old job just as Joseph predicted) learned of this, he told Pharaoh about Joseph's accurate dream interpretation causing Pharaoh to send for Joseph (41 v9) Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams to mean that there would be seven plentiful years and seven years of famine. He said, "**The dream was doubled to Pharaoh, because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass**" (41 v32) He advised Pharaoh to appoint a **discerning man** over Egypt and overseers to gather food during the plenteous years so that they might be ready for the famine years (41 v33-36)



Pharaoh said to Joseph, ““Because God has shown you all of this, there is none so discreet and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and according to your word will all my people be ruled. Only in the throne I will be greater than you”” (41 v39-40) I mean honestly; I don’t think even Sir Alan Sugar on the Apprentice would just appoint someone to high office based on their ability to interpret dreams do you? But this one of those moments when you just know God has put HIS chosen person in a position to make a difference and that everything is going to be OK.

So as the high official under Pharaoh during the next seven years, Joseph gathered and stored great quantities of food for use during the famine (41 v46)

Now we find that the famine is not a localised thing but covers most of what we know as the Middle East because when the famine began, Israel (aka Jacob) sent his sons to Egypt to obtain grain.



Jacob learns there is grain in Egypt and sends his sons to buy grain

‘But Jacob didn’t send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with his brothers; for he said, “Lest perhaps harm happen to him”” (42 v4) - Benjamin being Jacob’s youngest son and the son of Jacob’s beloved wife Rachel.

Joseph’s older brothers came to Egypt and appeared before him (42 v1) Joseph recognized them but they failed to recognize him. Joseph accused them of being spies and ordered them imprisoned (42 v17) Later, he offered to allow nine of them to return to their father with grain. He ordered them to bring Benjamin on their return trip (42 v18-20) and kept Simeon as a hostage to insure their return (42 v24)

He then ordered his servants to fill their bags with grain and to put their money - their payment for the grain - into their bags (42 v25) When the brothers discovered the money, they were distressed because they thought that they would be accused of theft (42 v28 & 35)



However, the famine was severe and Simeon was still in Egypt so the brothers persuaded their father to allow them to take Benjamin to Egypt. Judah attempted to guarantee Benjamin's return, saying, "If I don't bring him to you, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever" (43 v9) The brothers took the money from their bags to return it as payment for their original purchase and took gifts to placate Joseph, whose identity they still did not know.

When they returned to Egypt, Joseph had a big dinner for them which frightened them because they thought that they were being set up and that he would accuse them of stealing the money that they had found in their bags. However, when they told him about the money and tried to return it to him, Joseph said, "***Peace be to you. Don't be afraid. Your God, and the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks. I received your money***" (43 v23)



When the brothers were ready to return home, Joseph had his servants fill their sacks with grain and place their money at the top of the sacks. Then he had the servants place his silver cup in Benjamin's sack (44 v2) He then accused the brothers of stealing the cup, and used that as a pretext for taking Benjamin back to Egypt as a slave (44 v3-13) Judah

and his brothers returned to Egypt and pled for Benjamin's release (44 v14) Judah offered to stay in Egypt as a slave in Benjamin's place (44 v33)

It is at that point that our text today begins.



And Joseph clears the room except for his brothers and then he pours out his heart and reveals himself as the brother that they sold into slavery - and look what happened to him: sold into slavery and now the second most powerful person in Egypt. - Ha! Boo, sucks to you brother, the boy done good. Despite what you tried to do to him, but here's the thing...he doesn't hold it against them; he says it was all part of Gods plan.

Joseph said in *Genesis 50:20*: "“You brothers meant evil against me but God meant it for good.”" Joseph was sold into slavery, but that evil event turned out to be part of God's plan. They meant evil towards him but God used it for Good; so first of all, it teaches us that God can turn evil into good.

What seems to be evil can be turned into good...This is often true of us in our lives: when something bad happens to us and it turns out later to be good.



A second quality we learn from this story is; I also believe, that the story teaches us that God is with us even (and maybe especially) when we go through the pits of life. When Joseph's brothers threw him in the pit, God was with him and protected him. When he was sold as a slave, God went with him. When Joseph was falsely accused of trying to seduce and attack Potiphar's wife, he spent over two years in prison but God was with

him during his time in prison. Through all of these hardships and pits, Joseph was made a person of character. Through all the things that happened to him he did some serious growing up. No longer was he the spoiled young son but he became a man of God who was respected as a great leader.

I am reminded of what the Apostle Paul said in *Romans 5*:

“Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts.” Suffering can produce perseverance and character. So even when we feel that God has abandoned us; when we are in the pits of life, God is always with us and will strengthen us.

The third lesson; and maybe the most important, that we learn from the Joseph story is about forgiveness. Joseph had the right and the power to punish his ten half-brothers for doing what they did to him. He could have gotten his pound of flesh from them; his revenge on them; but in his mercy, Joseph forgave his brothers and wept over them when they finally reconciled.



Some Biblical commentators compare this forgiveness of Joseph to the love of God. That is: God has the right and power to punish us and we deserve it; but rather than punish us, God has freely and generously forgiven us; restored the relationship with us and has abundantly and freely blessed us - just as Joseph did to his brothers.

God could have punished us but didn't and so Joseph is represented as a parallel to God and God's forgiveness and blessings - **freely given**. Also, the Gospel lesson for today invites us to "love our

enemies and do good to them who persecute you”; to be “merciful and abundant in our forgiveness” and God will reward us for such a life.

In the Joseph story, the enemies are the half-brothers who tried to kill him but Joseph responds to them with love and forgiveness. I suppose we could learn a few things from that couldn't we.

Amen