

## Worship for Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020

### Call to worship

We bring ourselves to worship knowing that we are connected to other Christians and God's people everywhere, that we are joined together by the Spirit.

### Opening Prayers

God of Grace

We come before you longing to praise you and please you.

We come before you today with thankful hearts;  
grateful for your grace that is poured out not just for the best bits of ourselves,  
but also for the bits we feel ashamed of.

We come before you today knowing that you change us, despite our inclinations to resist change. Help us to be open to the power of your spirit to transform us

We come before you today:

take our good intentions,  
take the messiness of our lives,  
take our best bits  
take our worst bits,  
take our willingness to be changed,  
take us as individuals  
take us as a community  
and weave it all into the fabric of your kingdom.

Take us, use us, change us, Lord.

Open our hearts so that we might see more of You.

### We say the Lord's Prayer

#### StF 668 –

Teach me, my God and King,  
in all things thee to see,  
and what I do in anything,  
to do it as for thee.

For those who look on glass  
on it may stay the eye;  
or if it pleases, through it pass,  
and then the heaven espy

All may of thee partake:  
nothing can be so mean,  
which with this tincture, 'For thy sake'  
will not grow bright and clean.

## Readings:

Genesis 25, 19-34 read by Chris Reed

Matthew 13, 1-9, 18-23 read by Wendy Bate

## Reflections

Life under the lockdown has tested and challenged relationships in different ways. It was reported that children are particularly finding it difficult to stay indoors when parents are constantly at each other's throat. But it can be equally difficult when children do not get on among themselves. These relationship difficulties connect well to today's Old Testament reading of Genesis 25, 19-34. We have Isaac and Rebekah whose relationship is less than ideal; and their two sons - Esau and Jacob – who do not exhibit any sign of brotherly love or care. I wonder what this family would have become during the last three months of lockdown. Jacob schemes and wins his brother's birth right by coercion, while Esau gives it up for nothing more than a bowl of lentil stew. Commentaries make Esau a man of strong appetites and hot temper. When he is hungry, he thinks of nothing but his stomach. After hunting all day, he comes upon Jacob and his bubbling pot of lentil stew and says, in very rough Hebrew, "Let me gobble up some of this red, red stuff, for I am famished" (25:30). Jacob sees the opportunity to take what is not his, but the narrator has no sympathy for Esau: "He ate and drank and rose and departed and thus Esau despised his birth right" (25:34). As we know, this scene is just a foretaste of what follows in chapter 27, the story of Jacob and Rebekah fooling blind Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob rather than to Esau.

I am not particularly impressed with this family: intrigues, lies, plots, deceit and cunning dominate their relationship. For me, the worst of the story is that Rebekah and Jacob seem to have got away with their crimes. But maybe these four characters are no more than metaphors of what goes on in our own families. Maybe before we point fingers to this dysfunctional family, the passage may be inviting us to reflect on our families and the kind of love and care that are given and received there.

Although Jacob is not presented to us in today's reading as an admirable figure, we are encouraged to see in him a man who is focused on obtaining the blessing of God; already promised to his grandfather Abraham. And his focus on that blessing will shape the rest of his life. Reading the rest of the book of Genesis one finds that Jacob is chasing after this blessing which he never fully possesses. As the story goes, the blessing will bring wealth and children, but it will also mean exile, loss, and sorrow. This man will wrestle with himself, with others and with God who knew him before he was born; a God who is prepared to challenge him, to wrestle with him; but also to bless him. When I read Jacob's story I am confronted with a human story of shortcomings, sinfulness, love, and blessings; all mixed together.

For me it is actually comforting to know that within such chaotic and dysfunctional family life, God will show up and show his love and bring blessings despite what you and I can call extreme cases of deceit and cheating. This is not to say that God is happy with the deceiving and cheating; but rather at work, transforming these situations into positive relationships in which people are loved, cared for, and blessed. **Amen.**

### **Prayers of intercession**

We bring to you Lord, a world in need, a world in pain, a world seeking for hope, for joy, for peace.

We hold up all those affected by the Coronavirus:  
all working on the front-line to support those most in need;  
all those enabling our lives to continue to function;  
all those working in hospitals and health centres around the world;  
all those seeking a vaccine and at the fore-front of research.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We bring to you all those whose lives have been made worse by this virus:  
those who have lost loved ones;  
those who are living with symptoms;  
those living in fear;  
those in situations, countries or environments that make it impossible to self-isolate or feel safe.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We bring to you all the concerns and fears in our world that have been ignored, overlooked or moved lower-down the priority list because of global attention on the pandemic:  
those without a home;  
those living in poverty;  
those living with other diseases or health conditions.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for our friends who live in loveless and dysfunctional families, relationships in which deceit, lies and manipulations are daily occurrences. We hold them up to you that they know the power of your love and the blessing of your presence; so that their lives are changed, and their relationships transformed.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for ourselves, that we may work together for the fulfilment of your kingdom in our community and our church. Help us to be best people we can be; to do our best especially when no one is looking, and no one will ever say thank you to us.

We bring these prayers to you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

## **Hymn: Singing the Faith 563 - O Jesus, I have promised**

O Jesus, I have promised  
to serve you to the end;  
Lord, be for ever near me,  
my Master and my friend;  
I shall not fear the battle  
if you are by my side,  
nor wonder from the pathway  
if you will be my guide.

O let me feel you near me;  
the world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
the tempting sounds I hear;  
my foes are ever near me,  
around me, and within;  
but Jesus, now draw near,  
and shield my soul from sin.

## **Blessing**

May the love of the Lord rest upon your soul.  
May his love dwell in you throughout every day.  
May his countenance shine upon you  
and be gracious to you.  
May his Spirit be upon you as you leave this place.  
StF 771