

## Worship for Sunday, 9 August 2020

### Prayer

Eternal God,  
 you are present with us throughout our lives,  
 even when others plot to do us harm.  
 May we learn to live together in unity,  
 that in all we do,  
 we may sing your praises now and forever. Amen

### Hymn 609 (read together)

1. As we gather in your presence now,  
 Lord, we will worship;  
 as we sing our thankful songs aloud;  
 Lord, we will worship.  
 When we go out in the name of Christ,  
 Lord, we will worship;  
 as your word and Spirit shape our lives,  
 Lord, we will worship.

*And whatever we do, in word or deed,  
 we do for the one who set us free;  
 when we're on our feet or on our knees,  
 Lord we will worship,  
 Lord we will worship.*

2. When we love our friend and families  
 Lord, we will worship;  
 when we give ourselves to those in need,  
 Lord, we will worship  
 when we take instruction cheerfully,  
 Lord we will worship;  
 when we lead with Christ's humility,  
 Lord, we will worship

3. In the course of every working day,  
 Lord, we will worship  
 when our business takes us far away  
 Lord, we will worship  
 when we care for children in the home  
 Lord, we will worship;  
 when our audience is you alone,  
 Lord, we will worship.

Joel Payne

**Bible Reading from Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28**

## **Reflections**

My reflections of Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> July were based on the accounts of Jacob conspiring with his mother to lie to his father Isaac and steal his brother's birth-right and blessing. I reflected that this was a dysfunctional family where parents set a bad example and their sons followed it. The results were that one son had to flee; leaving the other heartbroken and probably the parents without their sons. In today's reading, the Jacob has now grown up, married two sisters and had children with both of them and their servants. The result of these unions was 12 boys and one girl about whom we hear very little. In this passage, it looks as if Jacob himself hadn't learnt anything. He just repeats the same mistakes his parents made. His favouritism directed to the young son Joseph results in the sibling rivalry which comes close to murder and sets in motion a chain of events that occupy the rest of the book of Genesis until the end; this is from chapter 37 to 50. Indeed, the events of this text will impact the rest of the story of the Israelites, as they leave the Promised Land at the end of Genesis to settle in Egypt.

Today's passage continues the saga of Jacob's family and introduces us to the figure of Joseph. The lectionary divides the story in an odd way, so that the account of Joseph's two dreams is omitted from the reading. Verses 5 to 11 contain the dreams which implied that Joseph's father and mother and brothers would one day bow before the boy and worship him. The interpretation was clear to the brothers who developed an intense hatred of their little brother Joseph who seemed to be spoiled and full of himself. He was only seventeen years old; and favourite son of his father Jacob who, from his own history, should know the danger of playing favourites. Joseph is the first son of Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife, "the son of his old age" as we read in chapter 37 verse 3. To show his love for Joseph, Jacob gives him a special robe. Traditionally translated, "coat of many colours," the Hebrew term here probably refers to a coat with long sleeves or to an ornamented coat. (The only other place in the Bible such a clothing is mentioned is in 2 Samuel 13:18, where it is the royal garment of King David's daughter, Tamar. In any case, the coat is an explicit sign that Jacob loves Joseph more than any of his other sons, and they hate Joseph because of it.

Joseph is portrayed as a young man somewhat lacking in common sense, or perhaps simply a bit self-absorbed. He has two different dreams with the same message: He will become preeminent in his family. His brothers (and even his parents) will bow down to him! Seemingly unaware of his brothers' feelings for him, he eagerly shares these dreams with them. They hate him both because of the dreams and because he insists on talking about them (37:8). Even his approving father rebukes him for his words (37:10).

Perhaps Jacob, too, is unaware of the feelings his other sons have for Joseph, because Jacob sends him to check on them while they pasture the flocks. Joseph, again showing a lack of common sense, wears his special robe -- the sign of his father's favour -- as he goes in search of them (37:23).

The brothers, when they see Joseph coming, refer to him scornfully as "this master of dreams" (37:19), and they conspire to kill him. Reuben, the oldest brother, persuades them otherwise. They instead strip Joseph of his beautiful robe and throw him into an empty well nearby. This is the first of several literal and metaphorical descents (and ascents) Joseph will make in the story. Drawn out of the pit, he is taken "down" to Egypt (39:1) and sold into slavery. Nevertheless, blessed by God, he rises to a position of authority in Potiphar's house (39:2-4). Falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, he is again taken down, this time into prison. Once again, God blesses him, and he rises to a position of authority (39:22-23). Forgotten by Pharaoh's chief cupbearer after he correctly interprets his dream, Joseph seems fated to spend the rest of his life in prison (40:23). Then the cupbearer remembers, and Joseph is raised once again from the "pit" of prison to the highest position possible: he becomes the second in command in Egypt.

Joseph's brothers, meanwhile, have deceived their father. They have taken Joseph's special coat and dipped it in the blood of a slaughtered goat, then sent the coat to Jacob (37:31). Their father, of course, draws the obvious conclusion that Joseph is dead, killed by a wild animal. It is worth noting that Jacob is deceived by his sons just as he deceived his own elderly father. And in both cases, a

slaughtered goat and a clothing or coat are the instruments of deception (27:15-16). As we saw in the story of Jacob and Laban, Jacob's actions come back to haunt him.

Yet, God continues to be at work in the lives of Jacob and his family. You and I would think that God would abandon such a dysfunctional, chaotic and deceitful family. The fact that a murder is nearly avoided does not take away the pain of this teenager being sold into slavery with all the danger this implies to his life. Why is God interested in this family? I must be honest to you and admit that I do not know the answer; only God can answer this question. But I can share with you two of the things which I think are going on in this story:

First, through the ups and downs of our lives, God is with us. In the same way Joseph's life went deep down and back up, our lives have known and will know such moments of utter joy, exhilaration and top of the mountain awe and wonder. There are also moments of loneliness, despair and hopelessness in the same way Joseph experienced these. Sometimes it was because of his arrogance and unwise approach to his brothers; sometimes it was his father's fault; other times it was his brothers' intense jealousy. When he gets to Egypt, he did what he could do to be on the right side of law and order. But all of this didn't prevent him from being in trouble. Similarly, sometimes despite our best effort we still get into difficulties. In the same way God has been with Joseph, today's passage reminds us that God is with us especially when we feel down and low, and things are not going well for us.

Second, today's passage speaks of God's faithfulness to his plans for us and for humanity. This faithfulness does not depend on our wickedness or even righteousness. God continues to work through human tragedies, human sinfulness and the miseries we cause to each other. Not because he enjoys being embroiled in such messy and painful situations; but simply because he cannot abandon us. This is good news to us.

The God we worship is faithful and will never abandon us, no matter what. He calls us to be faithful to him as he is faithful to us. We can only achieve this by re-examining our relationship with him and our relationship with each other as sisters and brothers in God's household. **Amen**

***Prayer of Intercession (using Hymn 696)***

For the healing of the nations  
 Lord, we pray with one accord;  
 for a just and equal sharing  
 of the things that earth affords.  
*To a life of love in action  
 help us rise and pledge our word.*

Lead us forward into freedom;  
 from despair your world release,  
 that, redeemed from war and hatred,  
 all may come and go in peace.  
*Show us how through care and goodness  
 fear will die and hope increase*

All that kills abundant living,  
 let it from the earth be banned;  
 pride of status, race, or schooling  
 dogmas that obscure your plan.  
*In our common quest for justice  
 may we hallow life's brief span.*

You, Creator-God, have written  
 your great name on humankind;  
 for our growing in your likeness  
 bring the life of Christ to mind;  
*that by our response and service  
 earth its destiny may find.*

Fred Kaan (1929-2009)

## **Bringing the prayers together in the Lord's Prayer**

### **Prayer for our Giving**

#### ***Concluding Hymn (read together)***

Christ be my leader by night as by day  
 Safe through the darkness, for he is the way  
 Gladly I follow my future his care.  
 Darkness is daylight when Jesus is there

Christ be my teacher in age as in youth  
 Drifting or doubting, for he is the truth.  
 Grant me to trust him; though shifting as sand  
 Doubt cannot daunt me: in Jesus I stand.

Christ be my Saviour in calm as in strife;  
 Death cannot hold me, for he is the life.  
 Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and its stain  
 Can touch my salvation; with Jesus I reign.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

### **Blessing**

May the God who created us keep us safe.  
 May the Lord who gave himself for us teach us his way of love  
 May the Spirit who guides us inspire us to be faithful  
 And may the One God bless us, Father, Son and Spirit. **Amen**

### **Breakout Groups**

#### **Grace**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 and the love of God  
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
 be with us all; and evermore. **Amen**