
Sunday 9th August – The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Readings: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 & Matthew 14:22-33

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

This is the account of Jacob's family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph sold by his brothers

Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, 'As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.'

'Very well,' he replied.

So he said to him, 'Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.' Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, 'What are you looking for?'

He replied, 'I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?'

'They have moved on from here,' the man answered. 'I heard them say, "Let's go to Dothan."' "

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. 'Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.'

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. 'Let's not take his life,' he said. 'Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the

wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him.' Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe – the ornate robe he was wearing – and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.' His brothers agreed.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus walks on the water

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'

'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'

'Come,' he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

Reflection

Where does doubt creep in for you? Is it in your ability to do your job, insecurities about how you look, concerns around your relationships, or fear about what the future holds?

Most of us have moments of bravery when we think we can achieve great things but all too often they are soon followed by crushing doubts that hold us back. Doubts in themselves aren't bad - they can keep us grounded and maintain our humility. But the problem begins when doubts mean we don't step out into the places that God is calling us or when we don't trust in the promises he's made us. Then we're defeated by them.

Peter and the disciples are terrified when they see Jesus walking on the water. But Peter reacts in a typically hot-headed manner - he asks Jesus to prove it's really him by enabling Peter to also walk on the water. Although Jesus later rebukes Peter for having "little faith", I think Peter's response shows his trust in Jesus and his abilities. He could ask Jesus to prove himself by doing something basic ("Tell me what we did today" would seem a much simpler way!) but he doesn't. He asks Jesus to perform a miracle which, if it goes wrong, could end with Peter's death.

And it's all going so well at first. Peter is looking at Jesus and he's doing it - he's walking on water! I can imagine the look of determination on Peter's face and the look of pride and encouragement on Jesus's. But then Peter loses focus. He stops looking at Jesus and he sees the wind swirling around him, he realises what he's doing, and it all falls apart. He's brought back down to earth as he realises the enormity of what he's doing and he begins to sink.

But even in that moment Peter shows faith as he cries out to Jesus to save him. He's lost faith in some ways but he still holds fast to his belief that Jesus is able to do what is needed to protect him and save him. And Jesus does - he responds immediately and grabs hold of Peter.

When the storms of life are swirling around you, where are you looking? All too often I'm looking at the difficulties, focussing on the fear, worrying about what's happening. Like Peter I need to keep my head up and my eyes fixed on Jesus. I need to see his encouraging face and his outstretched hand as he leads me. Because in the words of the old hymn, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace."

My encouragement for all of us today is to look at Jesus and not the storm. But if, like Peter, you're already sinking in the midst of the turmoil; if your faith has

already faltered and you're drowning then be encouraged that it's not too late. Just call out his name and ask Jesus to save you. And his hand will grab hold of you and pull you up.

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