
Sunday 16th August – The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Readings: Genesis 45:1-15 & Matthew 15:21-28

Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Make 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. Afterwards his brothers talked with him.

Matthew 15:21-28

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.

Reflection

This Lectionary Reflection focusses on the passage in Genesis 45. To understand the significance of these verses we need to be aware of the background story.

A dysfunctional family

Joseph was one of the twelve sons of Jacob, born into a large, dysfunctional family. He was Jacob's favourite and sometimes Joseph would spy on his half-brothers and report back to Jacob.

Joseph told his family about dreams he had where they all bowed down before him. His brothers, already jealous now hated Joseph and planned to kill him. But instead they sold him into slavery and told their father that he had been killed by a wild animal.

Potiphar's household

The traders who had bought Joseph sold him to Potiphar, captain of the Egyptian Palace guard. God blessed Joseph in Potiphar's house and he gained promotion. The Bible describes Joseph as 'handsome and well built' and Potiphar's wife 'began to look on him lustfully'. She wanted sex but Joseph refused and when she realised that Joseph was not going to agree she accused him of rape and was sent to prison.

Forgotten in prison

In prison Joseph interpreted the dreams of two other prisoners – one was executed, one was restored to his former position, just as Joseph had said. But the

restored prisoner forgot all about Joseph! The narrative continues two years later when Pharaoh had two dreams which no-one could interpret. Suddenly Joseph is remembered and is able to explain Pharaoh's dreams. There would be in Egypt seven years of great prosperity followed by seven years of famine.

Joseph made ruler of Egypt

Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's explanation and suggestions as to what to do over the next 14 years that he put him in charge. He became the highest figure in the land after Pharaoh.

When the famine struck, people came from all over to buy grain, including Joseph's brothers from Canaan. They came and bowed before Joseph. He recognised them but they didn't recognise him!

Joseph reveals his identity

His brothers made other journeys to Egypt to buy grain but still didn't recognise Joseph. And so we come to the Bible passage.

Joseph could stand it no longer. He sent everyone out except his brothers. He wept as he told them who he was and asked if his father was still alive. The brothers were stunned and afraid. But Joseph assured them that 'it was God who sent me here, not you!' This dysfunctional family was restored and safe.

Three lessons:

God will use every aspect of our lives, even the things that don't seem to fit, to bring about his purposes.

Joseph was sold into slavery, arrested for a crime he didn't commit, forgotten for two years but God was still in control!

Even if you find yourself in 'prison' don't lose hope in God's promises.

Imprisoned by fear, doubt, illness, loss, depression, broken relationships or anxiety? We can still trust God's promises!

Forgiveness is always part of God's plan.

It's not optional but a choice we have to make; like Joseph did with his brothers.

"Our cherished plans may go astray or our hopes may fade away. But still, let us trust the Lord to lead us. He does know the way."

Peter Sanderson