

Sunday 16th August Trinity 10

Collect

Lord of heaven and earth,
as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer,
give us patience and courage never to lose hope,
but always to bring our prayers before you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

First Reading:

Isaiah 56:1. 6-8

Thus says the LORD:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.
And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—
⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.
⁸Thus says the Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.^[a]

or Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ²And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ ¹²And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. ¹³You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” ¹⁴Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Second Reading: Romans 11:1-2a. 29-32

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.
For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now^[b] receive mercy. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Gospel: Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28

¹⁰Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand: ¹¹it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” ¹²Then the disciples approached and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” ¹³He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind.^[c] And if one blind person

guides another, both will fall into a pit.”¹⁵ But Peter said to him, “Explain this parable to us.”¹⁶ Then he said, “Are you also still without understanding?¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.”¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.²⁰ These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

²¹ Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” ²³ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” ²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” ²⁶ He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Reflection

Some weeks you wonder just what on earth the Lectionary compilers were thinking.....others you are totally spoilt for choice in the richness of the set readings. This week is the latter, so I have included all the set readings for you to explore.

Genesis 45 sees the climax of the story of Joseph. Popularised by Webber and Rice’s musical theatre adaptation, it is a story of jealousy, revenge, betrayal, power and ultimately redemption. The jealous brothers who had betrayed Joseph now stand in his presence, begging him for salvation in the form of grain. They have no idea who they are speaking with; so far as they are concerned, Joseph is a slave somewhere and probably dead. Well – yes – Joseph is a slave somewhere but that somewhere is in the court of Pharaoh and he is chief adviser to the head of the greatest superpower of the day (the Bible never says that he was ever released from his servitude). A far cry from the gawky, uppity teenager they had ‘disposed of’ years earlier. Unrecognisable in fact.

After all that had happened, Joseph not only forgives his brothers, but absolves them of blame. He sees the bigger picture and realises that if it were not for the chain of events their initial betrayal had set in motion, his whole family would starve to death and with it the promise made to Abraham decades earlier.

God has a knack of turning our experiences to good if we allow him to. As a slave in Potiphar’s service, Joseph starts to connect with the elite of Egyptian society, learning to be a skilled manager and farmer. The account says ‘The Lord was with Joseph’ and things go well until Potiphar’s wife takes a fancy to Joseph. A false accusation of assault lands Joseph in prison, with inmates from Pharaoh’s household. In an almost formulaic interjection, we again learn the ‘The Lord was with Joseph’ and things go well. Joseph gains a reputation for being a bit of a soothsayer and able to interpret dreams, but he also learns about the law, food distribution and how to be an administrator. Eventually his soothsaying talents come to the ears of Pharaoh who had experienced troubling dreams. ‘The Lord was with Joseph’. Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dreams as predicting a famine and is made commander in chief of Pharaoh’s action plan to deal with the coming situation.

‘The Lord was with Joseph.’ All that he had learnt in the way of administration, management, rationing, law and farming was put to good use. His plans saved Egypt and his family along with the fledgling nation of Israel.

The story of Joseph is a very personal one that had huge repercussions for two nations. Joseph took advantage of the opportunities that were put in front of him. Instead of trying to return to his old life and an uncertain fate, he trusts God, embracing the challenges God sends him, recognising that God is in the bigger picture as each piece of it is revealed.

Did Joseph ever long to return to his old life? The Bible does not say.

Today we are facing rank upon rank of challenges in our personal and national lives. Do we long to return to our old life? Or are we seeking to embrace the new challenges that are being laid before us? One thing is for sure – God still knows the bigger picture. We do not know when, where or how our current challenges will end, but when we recognise that even the most difficult of circumstances can have a positive outcome, we align ourselves with the bigger picture that is known to the Creator God of the Universe.

(Read the whole of Joseph’s story in Genesis chapters 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46 & 47.)

Rev Jenny Ellis