



Sunday 9th August 2020

9th Sunday after Trinity

**The Beacon Parishes Mission Community of Ipplepen with Torbryan,
Denbury, Broadhempston and Woodland**

FIRST READING

Genesis 37.1-4,12-28

Joseph Dreams of Greatness

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

Joseph Is Sold by His Brothers

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, 'Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.' He answered, 'Here I am.' So he said to him, 'Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me.' So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

He came to Shechem, and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, 'What are you seeking?' 'I am seeking my brothers,' he said; 'tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.' The man said, 'They have gone away, for I heard them say, "Let us go to Dothan." ' So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, 'Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.' But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, 'Let us not take his life.' Reuben said to them, 'Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him'—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.' And his brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

PSALM

Psalm 105.1-6,16-22,45b*

God's Faithfulness to Israel

O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually.
Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgements he has uttered,
O offspring of his servant Abraham,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

When he summoned famine against the land,
and broke every staff of bread,
he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
His feet were hurt with fetters,
his neck was put in a collar of iron;
until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the LORD kept testing him.
The king sent and released him;
the ruler of the peoples set him free.
He made him lord of his house,
and ruler of all his possessions,
to instruct his officials at his pleasure,
and to teach his elders wisdom.

that they might keep his statutes
and observe his laws.
Praise the LORD!

SECOND READING

Romans 10.5-15

Salvation Is for All

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that 'the person who does these things will live by them.' But the righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" ' (that is, to bring Christ down) 'or "Who will descend into the abyss?" ' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say?

'The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'

GOSPEL

Matthew 14.22-33

Jesus Walks on the Water

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

Reflection by Steven Sheldon

When I heard that our 17-year-old granddaughter Daisy was studying the US Civil Rights Movement as part of her A-levels, I started writing to her my thoughts and experiences on that and a range of related subjects. I've hammered out about 20 pages thus far. Lucky her. However she has received my outpourings with excitement and has permission to use me as a primary source in her studies and University applications. She hopes to study Politics and History at Manchester. How cool is that?

So I have been thinking these last few weeks a lot about slavery and racism in general, and today's reading from **Genesis 37** jumped out at me. Take a moment to read this passage. In this story, at the behest of his father Jacob, Joseph travels north up the Hebron valley through Shechem to Dothan to see how his brothers were getting on with dad's flock of sheep. Born of various mothers, the brothers were a mixed bunch of personalities, but they all hated Joseph for being a snitch, and out of that hatred they conspired to kill him. They disagreed how to do the deed, with Reuben even suggesting that fratricide was a bad thing, saying they should just chuck him in a dry well and let the elements and wild animals take care of him. Same result but they could at least believe their hands were innocent of bloodshed. When the brothers spotted a caravan of nomadic merchants travelling from Jordan down to Egypt [Ishmael and Midian were sons of Abraham and these merchants would have been distant cousins of the brothers] they thought up a win-win situation: get rid of Joseph without committing murder by selling him into slavery, and get some money as well. Job done!

This story is a reminder that slavery has been a feature of civilisation as long as there has been civilisation, and it has nothing to do with tribes or race. Joseph was their own flesh and blood.

10,000 years ago humans discovered that if you dug canals from the Euphrates River to dried plains nearby, you could grow lots of crops with which to feed your tribe. But this was very hard work, so the strongest tribe members forced the weaker ones to do the digging. Slavery was invented. The smarter tribe members learned how to organise things efficiently using the strong guys, and politics was invented. Stronger tribes raided and enslaved weaker neighbouring tribes. Tribes came together to form cities, and stronger cities raided and enslaved weaker cities. Cities formed nations, nations formed empires. The Warriors and Leaders shaped human history for thousands of years. Until mediaeval times and the development of profitable agriculture, raiding and looting was the primary source of national wealth. The Roman Empire sold 10,000 slaves a day from the Greek island of Delos. In the 16th century Turkish pirates working out of North Africa raided villages in Devon & Cornwall, enslaved the inhabitants and sold them on. Slavery has always been part of our human experience, and remains with us today.

But back at the beginning there was also another specialised class growing and developing. From the start there have been individuals who have sensed that violence was not the way to work together in community; they heeded that still small voice of spirituality that just knew that humans were meant to work together, not in opposition. These were the religious leaders who spoke truth to power. And power knew they were right, but were still tempted to do otherwise. Reuben knew it was wrong to kill his brother and spoke up, but hatred of his brother conquered the love he should have showed him, and Joseph suffered the lesser fate of enslavement.

I believe God, our Creator, the Father of all humanity, has always been there with us, urging, guiding, whispering to us to seek the better way; and there have always been prophetic souls hearing that whisper and speaking out. That is why all cultures

everywhere at all times have developed some form of Religion. Spirituality is not an option, it's part of being human. The Hebrew-speaking tribes heard those whispers better than any previous culture and God knew they would be the perfect medium for him to come directly to show us the way and the truth and the life. The language and tools were all there for Jesus to tell us what we need to know and do in order to make the Kingdom of God present in the world.

And that is to love our neighbour as our self. And by our neighbour, that means everybody. Paul explains that for those who choose to follow Jesus there are no distinctions to be made between Greek or Jew, free or slave, male or female. Jesus teaches us with unmistakable examples, using things we can understand and relate to. He does this because he wants us to understand the Kingdom when we see it, so that we will run to tell everyone we know that it has come very near. Our goal is to introduce everybody to Jesus so that neighbour-hatred can be eradicated. Which is a difficult goal, not one we will live to see, but nonetheless not to be neglected.

I am reminded of a line by Bob Dylan: *"Then he started in to dealing with slaves, and something inside of him died."* Slavery is not a race issue, but a human issue. From the earliest days we have damaged a part of our human spirit by choosing this form of commercial conduct. European colonists in the 17th, 18th centuries did not enslave Africans because they were Africans, but because they were available, being members of weaker tribes having already been captured and offered for sale by stronger tribes. Like the Romans on Delos. They would have bought Chinese or Indians or Arabs if there had been a mass market available. But having chosen to use Africans as slaves in order to exploit the resources of newly colonised lands, something inside of them died. Humans cannot enslave other humans with spiritual or psychological impunity. Centuries of this damage handed down over the generations has polluted our perception of others, and the chain of transmission needs to be broken by honestly addressing the problem, seeking God's grace, forgiveness and guidance. We must love and respect the wonderful great diversity of God's created humanity and work together in community to face some pretty troubled times ahead. Otherwise like Peter trying to walk on the water, we might just slide under the waves shouting, "Lord, save me!"

In writing about civil rights and politics in general, it's been my joy in writing to Daisy to introduce her to some amazing women who have been guided and strengthened by God's Holy Spirit like Elizabeth Stanton, Amelia Bloomer, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Sister Maria Skobtsova, Rev. Pauli Murray and Rt. Rev. Barbara Harris.

But my favourite is a Jewish woman whose name I forget, but whose words are immortal. As a young girl she was pulled alive out from a pile of dead bodies at an extermination camp by a black American soldier. When she immigrated to the US she joined the civil rights movement and marched at Selma with MLK and the Revs Murray and Harris. She reminds us that "Love is not something that you feel. Love is something that you do." To which I can hear Jesus say, "Amen."

Some optional footnotes for your information:

Perhaps throwing out a bunch of names like that is unfair for those of us who don't have instant access to an internet search engine. So I'll explain briefly who the women are that I mention, and you may want to do a little more research on your own. All of these women except the recently deceased Rt Rev Harris are honoured in the calendar of the Episcopal Church USA .

I am thankful to the Rt Rev Shannon MacVean-Brown, bishop of Vermont, for these descriptions.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton called on the church to stop using scripture to justify the oppression of women.

Amelia Bloomer was an active abolitionist and temperance advocate who sought freedom for women to use their minds and bodies.

Sojourner Truth escaped slavery with the help of Quaker friends; a powerful orator on women's rights, she preached on street corners, noticing and advocating for the poor.

Harriet Ross Tubman escaped slavery and answered God's call to help others gain their freedom; also known as Moses, she was the premier conductor on the Underground Railroad, leading more than seventy to freedom

Remembered on 20 July, each of these 4 women are united in their love of God which led them to helping others claim their freedom, reminding us that faith is action.

Maria Skobtsova was born into the cultural elite in St Petersburg, Russia; she was a poet, theology student, mayor, social activist, immigrant, resister of the Nazis, and a nun. She ministered to the poor and to the Jews seeking safety in occupied France. She and a priest were arrested for forging baptismal certificates for Jewish victims of the Nazis. Sister Maria died in a gas chamber at Ravensbruck camp. Her faith in Jesus arose from her fervent desire to be part of healing the world. The Church remembers her on 21 July.

Pauli Murray was the first African-American woman priest [1977]. She was a civil rights lawyer turned priest, graduating from Howard University in 1941. Rejected for post-graduate work at Harvard on basis of gender, she coined the phrase "Jane Crow" to illustrate a different perspective on both racism and sexism in the USA. The Church remembers her on 1 July.

Barbara Clementine Harris was ordained as the first female bishop in the Anglican Communion in 1989. Dying just short of her 90th birthday, I found her obit in The Times on 7 April this year profoundly inspirational. Surely it won't be long before her name is added to the list of people honoured by the Church.