



St Stephens Williamstown Uniting Church in Australia

Service of the Word for the Gathered at Home

Proper 15 (20) Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost / Sunday 16th August 2020

Prepared by Rev S. Juliette Maua'i

Place a cross and Bible on a table (if possible) with a **Green** cloth - today's Liturgical Colour. Open internet: copy then paste link OR click on link.

Readings: Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 133; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28

We Gather as the People of God

Call to Worship *Adapted from Psalm 133*

O God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit,
you are present with us throughout our lives,
guiding us to face reality of our situations each day.
How good and pleasant when kindred live together in unity!
Indeed, unity in humanity, the lands and waterways, your creation:
It is like the precious oil of anointing.
It is like the dew sprinkling over the mountains of Zion.
Together in kindred unity we gather in the presence of God. **Amen.**

Please remain standing as you are able



Song: TIS 154 Great is thy faithfulness <https://youtu.be/N-HszBrTGfA>

Please be seated

Acknowledgement to Country: I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this Land, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. I pay my respect to their Elders: past, present, and emerging.

Greetings / Welcome: The grace of the Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Opening Prayer

Holy God of Israel, Creator of our covenant through the prophets and our Saviour
you restore what is lost, heal what is wounded, and gather in those who have been rejected.
Give us the faith to speak bravely as did the Canaanite woman,
that the outcast may be welcomed and all people may be blessed. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession:

Merciful Creator,

Silent reflection and confession

when we rely on our lack of faith in your divine provision. **Lord, have mercy.**

Silent reflection and confession

when we fail to recognise God at work in the faith of others. **Christ, have mercy.**

Silent reflection and confession

in all that we have done and all that we have left undone. **Lord, have mercy.**

Silent reflection and confession...

Words of Assurance

God calls each of us by name and cries out with tears of joy for we recognize God in our confession.

Hear then Christ's words of grace, 'your sins are forgiven.' **Thanks be to God!**

Song: TIS 590 What a friend we have in Jesus <https://youtu.be/JTjUDJXTC6A>



Young People's Time:

Genesis 45:1-15 - Joseph reveals himself to his brothers <https://youtu.be/A5YfabT4ziQ>

Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28 - The faith of a Canaanite woman

<https://youtu.be/6feFnwEZxzo>

Song: TIS 459 In Christ there is no East or West <https://youtu.be/UNRyGGSOQLQ>

Please be seated

We Listen for God's Word

Genesis 45:1-15 Joseph reveals himself and reconciles with his brothers, and provides for his family due to the famine

Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28 (Things that defile)... The faith of a Canaanite Woman

Lord, may we meditate on these words of scripture and come to a deeper understanding of their meaning for our time.

Reflection: Relationships and communities reach a crossroads, "And he wept..." (Gen 45:2) - Rev. S. Juliette Maua'i

Last week I asked that you be patient in staying with the Hebrew Scriptures and not be too impatient to move on. That is, to take stock in the Book of Genesis, with Joseph literally taking stock in the cistern or pit before being taken to Egypt (Gen 37: 28). Time has passed and Joseph's brothers have returned with Benjamin, their younger brother, as Joseph instructed. But God was with Joseph!



Joseph is imprisoned, due to Potiphar's wife, and leads to Joseph interpreting the dreams of two prisoners (Gen 40). Pharaoh summons Joseph (Gen 41:4). Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream (Gen 41:25-36) and Joseph rises to power in Egypt (Gen 41:37-57).

Time and years pass by for Joseph, his brothers, and their father, Jacob. Joseph's hostile brothers in chapter 37 are older and feeling the impact of their struggles (Preaching through the Christian Year A). The famine in Canaan leads Joseph's brothers to Egypt, seeking grain (Gen 42:1-5) this first time round, and again when Joseph, whom they did not recognise, instructs them that they must return with their younger brother, Benjamin (Gen 42:26-44:34).

The focus on Joseph does not leave space for us to ponder if the brothers ever thought about Joseph. Did they reconcile what they had done to their brother, Joseph? Did they feel any remorse or guilt for their actions? Congruently, how did the years of separation between Joseph and his brothers pan out? Was Joseph plotting to take revenge and, could it be that Joseph's forced separation or exile in a foreign land be God's blessing (in disguise)?

Where is God? Where is God's blessing, and what does it look like?

Perhaps we can recognise God and God's blessing at the very the crossroads when come face to face. That is, where land meets land, Canaan meets Egypt. It is where community meets community, that is Egyptian meets Hebrew. It is where scarcity and famine, meets abundance or provision. It is where kindred meets kindred, that is Joseph meets his brothers, but still yet to reveal his true identity. It is where faith meets forgiveness – "[a]nd he wept" (Gen 45:2; cf. John 11:35, "Jesus wept"!)



Here at the crossroads Joseph is moved, "and he wept" (Gen 45:2; cf. Jn 11:35, "Jesus wept."; Gen 43:30; Job 30:25; Jn 11:33)! This is the merger realised; where all things come together for good (Rom 8:28) and, to offer forgiveness that flows abundantly from Joseph. In fact, Joseph is so overwhelmed, and he weeps so loudly, that the Egyptians outside the room, all the way to Pharaoh's house, can hear him (Gen 45:2).

God's provision, God's blessing, and God's plan to reunite the house of Israel is also in the act of forgiveness! (cf. vv.7-8). Blessings come in God's provision and forgiveness echoed in Joseph's first words to his brothers, when he revealed his true self, his true identity in Genesis 45:3. This must have hit Joseph's brothers from left field! "[B]ecause his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence". Joseph, reassures them, "I" am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt" (45:4b). Joseph's reassurance indicates his forgiveness. It points out why forgiveness comes so easily to him: in a brilliant flash of insight, he sees the hand of God at work in his life!

God sent Joseph to Egypt, as Joseph understood, so that years later, Joseph would be able to help fulfill God's plans for the chosen people whose survival would be threatened by the famine. Remember, God had made promises about these people being numerous as the stars!

Joseph explains why things transpired the way they did or at least how they turned out well in the end. He was keen to make this reunion a joy and so he gets right to the celebration. Go back now, and hurry, get our father, Joseph says. Then return here with your families, all your possessions, and make Egypt your new home so that I can take care of you in the hard days that still lie ahead. Joseph was overjoyed! His compassion and generosity seemed to be boundless.

The American scholar and theologian, Walter at work in our lives. That is to say, it is the unresolved, that requires trust in God's divine understand.



Brueggemann, refers to the "hiddenness" of God something hidden, inscrutable, playful, and purposes even when we cannot see or

Brueggemann says that Joseph listened and was willing to see, and "to host the hidden, inscrutable, unresolved purpose of God for his life that is beyond his control...[and] trust a purpose for his life that is larger than his own horizon" ("Taking a Second, Painful Look" in *The Threat of Life: Sermons on Pain, Power, and Weakness*).

God has the ability to see and provide, or act, in ways beyond our understanding! Brueggemann attributes Joseph's transformation to Joseph's new understanding that "God has been at work well beyond him." Joseph recognises God's divine blessing, "and he wept", offering forgiveness and provision in a climate of scarcity and famine, to his brothers.



As a church, as the Body of Christ in the world that is bigger than our individual lives or locality, we cannot see what is coming and what is ahead. We are at a crossroads and we cannot rely on our own strength or knowledge. Life is a challenge to understand what is really happening around us, and to understand why this coronavirus pandemic is difficult to control.

We ask, why some adhere to the current lockdown restrictions and why others blatantly oppose restrictions, and sadly, to the detriment of the wider communities. Our essential services people and our elderly folks are the most vulnerable, and others, in contracting the virus. But collectively, we are called to remain faithful to God and hope our collective prayers before God will sustain them and us, in God's larger mysterious divine plan.

The cocky immature dreamer it seems is able to interpret his dreams faithfully, to recognise his reality, and matured in his understanding of his life in God's hands, that delivered him into a place of influence to do good. If Joseph had any qualms about how his family would react, Barbara Brown Taylor says that Joseph saw a pattern in what was happening in that palace, that is, "he could see God's fingerprints all over the place."!

Friends of the Faith, and for those who feel their faith wavering because of lockdown, may you take joy in seeing "God's fingerprints" in your life and place, and in our current climate. May your recognition of God's fingerprints, bring you joy and gratitude knowing God is with you! **Amen.**

Song: TIS 136 There's a wideness in God's mercy https://youtu.be/vJwfT3SY_PU

We Respond to God's Word

Offertory Call – We sing of the faithfulness of the Lord and we seek you continually. (*adapted 105:2, 4*). Your giving helps our St Stephens community for God's mission in Jesus' name. Your offering is gratefully received.

Offertory Prayer - *Offering brought forward*

God of love and mercy,
we give you thanks for Jesus' compassion to move beyond the people of one community.
May we follow Christ's example in our giving, living, and stewardship.
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**



Psalm

THE LORD'S PRAYER... (*prayerfully pray the Lord's Prayer in the language/version of your choice*)

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, On earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, As we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial And deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

We Are Sent Forth into the World

Song: TIS 560 All my hope in God is founded <https://youtu.be/W3LCGh02Vew>

Blessing/Dismissal

Go in love to serve as God's people to heal division.

Go in hope to share the grace of Jesus, inviting others home.

Go in quiet confidence to be the Spirit's community in all places.

In the communion and blessing of God:

Mother, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Krista Tippett, Speaking of Faith, 21st century

"Truth can be told in an instant, forgiveness can be offered spontaneously, but reconciliation is the work of lifetimes and generations."