

Trinity 14 2020 13th September

13 th September Trinity 14	9.30 Holy Communion &	Genesis 50 vv 15-21 p57 Romans 14 vv 1-12 p1140 Matthew 18 vv 21-35 p985	SoF 425 How Great Thou Art 129 Freely Freely (with SA)
13th September Trinity 14	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 50 vv 15-21 p57 Romans 14 vv 1-12 p1140 Matthew 18 vv 21-35 p985	Psalms 103 19 Amazing Grace 357 Living Lord 418 O Jesus I Have Promised

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Jacob, who became Israel and the father of all the Israelites, had two wives – Leah and Rachel. They each had a handmaiden, respectively Zilpah and Bilhah, who also would bear Jacob children. In fact, Rachel was the last of the four women to become a mother. When she bore Joseph, Leah and the two handmaidens had already given Jacob ten sons and a daughter, Dinah. Rachel was the favourite wife and the son she bore Jacob was the favourite son and spoilt as a result. Joseph grew up to think of himself as superior to his parents' other children and even to his father and mother. It was to Joseph that Jacob gave the famous coat of many colours (or *richly ornamented* in the NIV or *long sleeved* in the NEB. {The meaning of the Hebrew is unclear.}). Joseph did little to improve his popularity with his brothers when he told tales against them to their father. Joseph even had dreams which seemed to confirm his superiority.

Rachel had one more son, Benjamin, dying in childbirth. She was buried near Bethlehem on the road to Jerusalem. The site which is believed to be Rachel's tomb is, after something like 3,000 years, a place where there is sometimes conflict between Jews and Arabs.

The time came when the older brothers were away from home seeking pasture for the flocks. Joseph was sent to see how they were getting on. From a long way off, they recognised him and saw the opportunity to get rid of this telltale they were so jealous of. Some of them wanted to kill him, but, Reuben, the eldest, persuaded them not to do that and had them put him in a pit. Reuben hoped to get the opportunity to send the boy home. Maybe the others thought that they would just leave him there to die.

As it happened, traders came by and Joseph's brothers sold him to them as a slave. We have heard a great deal lately about the horrors and scandal of the slave trade perpetrated by the British, several European nations and the Americans from the C17 – C19. Appallingly, slavery has defiled human history for much longer than that and has disfigured most of the face of the earth in the course of its occupation by human beings. The institution of slavery is one of the many tragic manifestations of original sin – the propensity of the human race to insult its Creator by disregarding His commandments. Slavery continues in the world today and the Church of England continues to campaign against its manifestations in what is called modern day slavery in which vulnerable people are forced into working very hard in poor conditions for very little remuneration and often compelled to live in far from adequate accommodation and subject to abuse. We're asked to watch out for and to report instances we suspect.

When they arrived in Egypt, the traders sold Joseph to Potiphar, a wealthy and powerful man and an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard. Joseph was talented and worked hard. He knew the LORD and he was beginning to learn his lesson. He was such an efficient servant that Potiphar quickly promoted him and put him in charge of his estates. However, Potiphar's wife fell for Joseph and, when he refused to sleep with her, she made out that he had attempted to rape her. Potiphar had Joseph committed to prison.

In prison, again Joseph worked hard and applied his talents. He really was learning his lesson. The jailer put Joseph in charge of the prison.

Now, Pharaoh's butler and baker were also put in prison and one night they both had strange and disturbing dreams. In the morning, Joseph asked them what was wrong, told them that the interpretation of dreams belongs to God, and explained to them the meaning of their dreams. In three days, the butler would be exonerated and return to his position at the palace, but the baker would hang. Both these prophecies came to pass and the butler promptly forgot about Joseph.

Until, Pharaoh himself experienced some disturbing dreams. Then they brought Joseph from the prison. He told Pharaoh that God was giving him notice that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh made Joseph viceroy of Egypt with responsibility for managing the harvests, storing as much as they could in the years of plenty, distributing what they had stored in the years of famine.

When the famine became severe in Canaan, where Jacob and the rest of Joseph's family still lived, Joseph's brothers were sent to Egypt to buy food. Now, it was the brothers' turn to learn some lessons the hard way, but the upshot of it all was that all the Children of Israel came to live in Egypt and were saved from starvation. In today's OT lesson, Jacob dies and the older brothers think that Joseph will now take revenge on them for selling him into slavery all those years before. So they tell him that Jacob commanded Joseph to forgive them. ¹⁹ *And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?* ²⁰ *But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* ²¹ *Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.* Joseph isn't God to judge his brothers and to mete out punishment on them. In the epistle, St Paul tells us not to judge and condemn. In the Gospel, Jesus teaches us to forgive. The psalm wonderfully praises God for His mercy and forgiveness.

The point of the Joseph story is that all the actors in it behave badly. They are all sinners. We are all sinners. There are lessons which they all have to learn. There are lessons we need to learn, sometimes by experience. Very bad things happen to Israel and the Children of Israel and they do bad things themselves. But God is in control. Despite our human sinfulness and stupidity, our lives are in the Hands of God. *He's got the whole world in His Hands. God is working His purpose out.* Bad things may happen. We may do bad things. But God is in control. He loves us not in spite of our faults, but including our faults, and He uses our failings as well as our merits to accomplish His good purposes for us and for the world. Whatever happens, we can be sure that God's good purposes will be accomplished.