

God's  
Promise  
Genesis – What  
Happened Next.

Bible Notes July - September 2023

July 1<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 23 vv 1-20

In Acts chapter 7, the first Christian martyr, St Stephen, lays out the history of the outworking of God's promises and their fulfilment in Jesus. He points out that, while God promised to Abraham and his descendents the land of Canaan, Abraham never actually owned any of it except this place of burial. Abraham was a wandering nomad in Canaan, travelling with his flocks and herds from one well to another – seeking out water and pasture. This burial place, however, is of great significance. We display reverence towards graves and tombs. Unless there are very good reasons for doing so, we do not disinter bodies. We expect graves to be treated with respect. We're disgusted if monuments are vandalised. Having purchased this burying place from the sons of Heth, Abraham has a stake in the land of Canaan, a stake which would not lightly be taken from him and those who came after him. Other members of the family would be buried there. You can still see the tomb of Abraham at Hebron. It is a significant site for Jews and Arabs, both of whom claim to be descended from Abraham. Sometimes, there are outbreaks of violence at Hebron, but that is not showing reverence to the tomb or to those who are buried there. Psalm 133: **BEHOLD**, *how good and joyful a thing it is : brethren, to dwell together in unity!* It is not honouring those who've died when their families fall out over funeral arrangements, wills, etc.. II Corinthians 16<sup>13&14</sup>: *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity.*

July 2<sup>nd</sup> (Trinity 4)

Genesis 24 vv 1-6

The two most important things in most people's lives are their faith and their love for their husband or wife. But what if these two great loves are pulling in opposite directions? We can possibly think of people we know of who (perhaps under pressure from their parents or their Church) have not married the person with whom they have fallen in love. This can be very hard and have devastating consequences for those involved. But we might also know of people who have drifted away from their God because they have married someone of a different faith or of no faith at all. And maybe we know of couples who are both sincere believers but in different religions and have found a compromise – perhaps celebrating one another's festivals, teaching their

children the stories of both religions. None of these options is satisfactory and people have to act in accordance with their own consciences, but, whatever else, we must be true to God and we cannot compromise with what we know to be false. If you or someone you know is in this position, a lot of prayer is needed.

**O GOD**, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. *Amen.*

July 3<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 24 vv 7

There is a further complication for Abraham. He doesn't want Isaac, the child of the promise, to marry a pagan woman, who might very well lead him away from worshipping the LORD wholeheartedly and exclusively. But the people who share Abraham's faith are his own family back in Haran. He certainly doesn't want the child of the promise to leave the Promised Land and return to live in Haran, the very place God instructed him to leave. So Abraham sends his trusted servant Eleazar to go to Haran and find a wife for Isaac.

July 4<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 24 vv 8&9

This is to be an arranged marriage, not a forced marriage. The distinction is very important. We here, even today, of young people being compelled by their families to marry people whom they may not like or even know. This is very wrong and always has been wrong. A valid marriage requires the consent of both parties. A shotgun wedding is no wedding at all. From the traditional wedding service:

*If no impediment be alleged, then shall the Curate say unto the Man,*  
**N WILT** thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

*The Man shall answer,* I will.

And the same for the woman. In some cultures, marriages may be arranged, but nevertheless the consent of both parties is essential. Less formally, we may all engage in match-making, trying to bring together people who we think would be good for one another.

July 5<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 24 vv 10-14

Eleazar is an old man and he has a tough task to perform. So he prays that he may be successful. That's something we should all do if we believe that what we are undertaking is in accordance with God's Will. Obviously, we shouldn't be doing anything which we don't believe is in accordance with God's Will. Explaining the Coronation service, it was stated that the oil of anointing signifies the grace which God supplies and which King Charles needs if he is to fulfil his vocation. But all we Christians have our vocations, the good works God has prepared for us to walk in. We all need His grace if we are to fulfil our calling. We shall not be anointed with the coronation oil, but we have all been baptised. Baptism is even more wonderful than coronation. Baptism makes us Christians - ready to serve God in whatever capacity He has in mind for us. Coronation and the associated anointing empower one particular Christian for one particular task. Colossians 3<sup>17</sup>: *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* We are after all kings and priests by the grace of God.

July 6<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 24 vv 15-21

Eleazar prayed – which was clearly the right thing to do – and he also asked God for a sign – which is less clearly the right thing to do. In the New Testament, the opponents of Jesus demand signs. Jesus responds, *An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.* The sign of Jonah is generally taken to be that, as Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale before returning to preach to the Ninevites, so Jesus would lie in the tomb until the third day, the Day of Resurrection. Jesus does plenty of signs, miracles, but the faithless do not recognise them for what they are. Neither do they discern the signs of the times. Today, we desperately need people whom God inspires to discern the signs of the times. To demand a sign, however, can be an act of faithlessness. It can even be an attempt to force God's Hand. *Lord, if you want me to go and see that difficult old person today, at least make the rain stop.* But it is always right to ask for guidance and that sometimes means asking for signs as Eleazar did. It's a subject we have to handle humbly, reverently and prayerfully.

July 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 24 vv 22-28

It was a patriarchal society. It mattered that Rebekah was *fair to look upon, a virgin*. It was taken as a sign of her good character that she drew water for this stranger, normally women's work, but work Eleazar could have done himself or any of the men who were with him. Not only did she draw water for the men, but also for ten camels, which was presumably a lot of water. The world has changed in many ways since the days of Abraham and we find ourselves confronted with all kinds of questions about gender, sex and relationships. I guess that most of you reading this are like me somewhere between the extremes. We don't want to live in a world in which women are subservient to men with few or no rights and people who deviate from a strictly defined normality are ostracised or even persecuted. But neither are we comfortable with an *anything goes* world in which all the traditional certainties and securities are swept away and, in the last analysis, people take responsibility only for their own personal well-being, indifferent to the welfare of others and the needs of wider society. Job 28: <sup>12</sup> *But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?* <sup>28</sup> *And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* Prayerfully, read the Bible, consider the teaching of the Church, look at the world around you, discuss these matters amicably with other people including those you instinctively disagree with. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all Truth, but it is a long process.

July 8<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 24 vv 29-31

Laban, Rebekah's brother, takes charge. The inference is that their father Bethuel is indisposed or perhaps temporarily absent. Rebekah has certainly been active. She's taken the initiative. She will be shown to be enthusiastic and eager to meet and marry Isaac. She is, however, under both the authority and the protection of her brother and her father. It's good to be protected – to have a family which is always there for you. Whether you are a woman or a man, it is good to know that there is someone upon whom you can always rely. But interdependence (which is a good thing) is not entirely compatible with independence (which is also a good thing). We sacrifice a degree of freedom when we make a commitment. God's service is perfect freedom. The relationship between husband and wife is analogous to that between Christ and the Church.

July 9<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 5)

Genesis 24 vv 32-49

**GRANT**, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Amen.*

Note the hospitality. The men (and the camels) are given the opportunity to freshen up. A meal is obviously being prepared. The youth leader who used to tell this story a lot was of the opinion that Eleazar was somewhat long-winded. Whatever, he was on this occasion keen to explain his mission and have the matter resolved without waiting till after dinner. Hospitality is a good thing. As we have seen, some people have entertained angels unawares. There is a good case for conducting business in the context of courteous human relations. We are not robots and we interact as friends or colleagues even when we have business to transact. Yet we're told by an old proverb not to mix business and pleasure. Eleazar is concerned that his business will be delayed if they eat before they negotiate. Sometimes business people have made rash decisions over boozy lunches! Mixing our personal relationships with business can result in corruption, for example giving a contract to a mate when someone else might have done a better job for a lower price. Personal relationships may also come under strain if brothers or a husband and wife team or old friends from school are in business together and cannot agree about what they ought to do. In the past, probably, it would have been taken for granted that an employer would take on friends and family and that there ought to be mutual obligations of trust between employers and employees. That can be very cosy, but it can also lead to inefficiency. You can't sack a son, however useless he might be at the job. It can be an exploitative relationship in which powerful people can dominate by sheer force of personality and take advantage of that situation to bully and abuse. It can be unfair to people who haven't got friends or family in the business. There were many towns in the past which had one major industry and it was expected that it would provide jobs for the sons of its existing workforce to the exclusion of outsiders. So, the trend is away from working relationships based on personal relationships towards impersonal blind recruitment processes, codes of practice, rules based disciplinary procedures, etc. These may be fairer

and more efficient, but they can also be sterile, alienating us from our working lives.

July 10<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 24 vv 49-60

Eleazar is impatient to get back to Abraham. He's brought gifts for Rebekah – another example of courteous exchange between people. Rebekah is free to choose whether or not she will marry Isaac and also is allowed to decide when she will set out. Her family want a delay. It's a long way to the Holy Land. They don't know when they will see her again, if ever. Probably they would have liked time to say goodbye properly and to prepare her for the journey. But Rebekah is young and eager and they honour her choice to set out at once.

July 11<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 24 vv 61-67

Although this was an arranged marriage, it seems also to have been love at first sight. Note the absence of ceremony. He took her to his tent and she became his wife. This is the only description of a marriage in the Bible! I sometimes point this out when families planning weddings today are getting overly stressed with regard to the minutiae of the arrangements. What really matters at a wedding is that the couples make their vows sincerely and that God blesses their union. I find it touching that Isaac was comforted for the loss of his mother by meeting his bride. Life goes on.

July 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 25 vv 1-18

Some people think that it is unfair that men can often become fathers much later in life than women can become mothers, but then there is much more to motherhood than there is to fatherhood. Isaac, the son of the promise, was Abraham's heir, but his other sons were not sent away with nothing. It still can be an issue. A man is surely responsible for the welfare of any children he fathers, but is it fair to his legitimate children and their mother if they have to share their inheritance with their father's other children born out of wedlock, perhaps as a result of very fleeting unions? Of course, the answer is to remain faithful to one woman, but, if a man sins, none of his children should suffer. Isaac and Ishmael cooperate to bury their father with Sarah in the family plot at Hebron. God had promised Abraham and Ishmael's mother, Hagar the

servant girl, that Ishmael's descendants would become a great nation and so they did.

July 13<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 25 vv 19-23

This is a theme which runs right through the Bible. Some of the most significant figures in the Bible story – Isaac himself, Sampson, Samuel, John the Baptist – are born to women believed to be unable to have children. This is one of the signs that they are special men. Infertility is still something which can cause great grief, although there are nowadays many medical advances which may sometimes make it possible for a couple to have children when nature has apparently failed them. We should behave with great sensitivity towards people who are troubled in this way and to be ready to pray for them. Sometimes, fostering or adoption is a gift childless couples can offer to children who are themselves orphans, who have parents who cannot cope, or who have been victims of abuse. Fostering or adoption, however, are not always the right way ahead either for the children concerned or for the prospective foster or adoptive parents. There are very strong emotions involved.

July 14<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 25 vv 24-26

God knew Esau and Jacob while they were still in the womb. He knew us while we were still in the womb. In fact, God knows us in all eternity. God knows us. He has always known us. He will always know us. He knows what kind of people we are, how we will turn out, what will happen to us, what is our final destiny. We live out our lives – every detail of our lives – within the providence of God. The mystery is that within this divine providence we make our own choices for which we are responsible but which nevertheless play their part in God's plan for us and for the whole of creation. No, I can't explain it; I don't understand it; but it's the way things are.

Psalms 131: **LORD**, I am not high-minded : I have no proud looks.

2. I do not exercise myself in great matters : which are too high for me.

3. But I refrain my soul, and keep it low, like as a child that is weaned from his mother : yea, my soul is even as a



weaned child.

4. O Israel, trust in the Lord : from this time forth for evermore.

July 15<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 25 vv 27&28

Children are always prone to think that their parents favour one over the other. It's unfortunate if this is really the case. *Lo, children and the fruit of the womb: are an heritage and gift that cometh from the Lord.* (Psalm 127<sup>4</sup>). This is how all children should be regarded. It does not make for a happy family or for healthy development if there is justifiable jealousy in a household.

Having said that, if I'd been a family friend when the boys were growing up, I think I would have liked Esau better than Jacob. Esau was impulsive and rash, but he wasn't sly. He was generous and apparently ready to forgive. He was an active young man, whereas Jacob seems to have been a bit of a mummy's boy. Having said that I find Esau more likeable, I have to acknowledge that it is Jacob who receives God's favour – a reminded, perhaps, that His ways are not our ways, that He knows better than we do.

July 16<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 6)

Genesis 25 vv 29-34

**O GOD**, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Redness is a theme here. Esau had red hair. He was also called Edom, which means red. The potage was made of red lentils. Esau and his descendants would inhabit the land east of the Jordan where the rocks are red. Petra is in Edom.

To me, Jacob seems just mean, not giving his hungry brother some of his food without asking for something so big in return and Esau appears just rash in accepting Jacob's terms. Perhaps he thought his brother was just joking. Anyway, it was no joke and this interchange altered the course of middle-eastern history. How different would things be

today, if Esau had inherited Isaac's patrimony in Canaan and Jacob had had to make his home elsewhere outside what we still know as the Land of Israel (Jacob's other name)? Esau's careless giving up of his birthright is taken as an analogy to those who carelessly *surrender these such good things as pass man's understanding* by indifference towards God.

July 17<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 26 vv 1-16

Isaac's father Abraham had had two experiences similar to this. Travelling through the land, there was the fear that another tribe or family would take your womenfolk and kill you for the privilege. So the tactic was to pretend that your wife was not your wife but some other relative. She might still be the victim of some sexual assault, but at least they wouldn't kill you. Dishonourable and dishonest, but what should Isaac have done?

We hear terrible stories about Britain in our own day of women afraid to walk alone at night or to take public transport, of police indifference when they report offences against them, even of police officers being themselves perpetrators of terrible crimes, including rape and murder. We hear the same things of university campuses, night clubs and other places where people congregate, even places of employment. We pray: *We beseech thee also to save and defend all Christian Kings, Princes, and Governours; and specially thy Servant CHARLES our King; that under him we may be godly and quietly governed: And grant unto his whole Council, and to all that are put in authority under him, that they may truly and indifferently administer justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintenance of thy true religion, and virtue.* We do need those in authority to administer justice without fear or favour, punishing wickedness and vice. Everybody would agree to that. But we also need to promulgate true religion and virtue. In the final analysis, the prevention of wickedness and vice cannot depend on instilling fear of punishment. The prevention of wickedness requires that people turn to Christ, repent of their sins and renounce evil – that we become good people who act in accordance with God's laws because it is our nature to do so, not because we are afraid of the

consequences if we do not. The ultimate purpose even of punishment is to make the bad person a better person.

July 18<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 26 vv 17-25

These verses remind us of the importance of water and how there may be conflict when it is in short supply. Some people think that demand for water, rather than demand for oil, will be the cause of future wars. Water is taken in vast quantities from the head waters of rivers like the Jordan to provide for the needs of households and to irrigate crops, leaving those downstream in danger of not having enough water for their own use. We've got used to virtually unlimited quantities of water, literally on tap – to drink, to bathe in, to wash our clothes. Some people even have their own private swimming pools. My guess is that we use a lot more water each day than our grandparents who had to draw water from a well. We possibly smell better too! We worry about running out of water as our population grows and periods of drought become more frequent. In some parts of the world, there is a real shortage of clean water even today, leading to hardship and the spread of infectious disease. It is good to support charities such as Water Aid which seek to ensure that everybody has enough of what is probably the most important element after air.

July 19<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 26 vv 26-33

There had been tension between the people of Gerar and Isaac's household who had come to live among them. There is often tension between travellers and settled communities, immigrants and those living in the place already, colonists and indigenous peoples – especially if there is perceived to be a shortage of resources. People are not happy if they think that travellers can get away with flouting the laws which the rest of us have to obey. Existing populations may worry that immigrants will take their jobs and put pressure on housing and local services. Expat communities may consider themselves superior to "natives" who live poorer and (by western standards) less civilised lives. On the other hand, travelling communities may resent that their traditional lifestyle is being squeezed out by a growing shortage of land and casual work. Immigrants may be refugees or they or their parents may have been invited to come here to fill jobs which local people are

not prepared to do. Perhaps even the colonists do some good, bringing modern technology and medicine and providing better paid jobs for local people, whereas the “natives” to whom they feel superior may themselves have an ancient culture which deserves to be respected and from which we could all learn. It is important to get the facts straight in these discussions, to be fair and generous in our judgments and to remember that we are all human beings made in the image of God & for whom Christ died.

July 20<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 26 vv 34&35

Esau, the impulsive one, takes two wives of the people of the land – pagans in fact. This, I am sure is the main reason why Isaac and Rebekah are grieved by his choice. If there is a conflict between what God requires of Esau and what his wives demand of him, which way will he go. Quite possibly, Esau didn't consider that or didn't foresee that it could matter. He was young. It's the same issue that we discussed on 2<sup>nd</sup> of this month.

July 21<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 27 vv 1-5

Isaac is realistic. He knows that he is coming towards the end of his life. He must prepare and provide for his family. We have to be realistic too. We may think about giving someone we trust power of attorney in case there comes a time when we can no longer manage our own affairs. We ought to have an up to date will. It is helpful for those who will be left if we can give them an idea of what funeral arrangements we would like. It can save a lot of trouble if your children know which of the family treasures will be bequeathed to which of your heirs. You may well consider any bequest you would like to make to charity. These words are to be found in the order for the Visitation of the Sick – a service not often used, but wise words nevertheless.

*Then shall the Minister examine whether he repent him truly of his sins, and be in charity with all the world; exhorting him to forgive, from the bottom of his heart, all persons that have offended him; and if he hath offended any other, to ask them forgiveness; and where he hath done injury or wrong to any man, that he make amends to the uttermost of his power. And if he have not before disposed of his goods, let him then be admonished to make his Will, and to declare his debts, what he oweth,*

*and what is owing unto him; for the better discharging of his conscience, and the quietness of his Executors. But men should often be put in remembrance to take order for the settling of their temporal estates, whilst they are in health. The Minister should not omit earnestly to move such sick persons as are of ability to be liberal to the poor. Some people try not to think about all this, but it's not morbid; it's reality and Christians have no need to fear the grave. Psalm 90<sup>12</sup>: So teach us to number our days : that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

July 22<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 27 vv 6-17

It's hard to believe isn't it? Who would deceive a blind old man? Especially if that blind old man was your husband or your father. Leviticus 19<sup>14</sup>: *Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but thou shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.* It has always been wrong to abuse the vulnerable or to take unfair advantage of them. Why? Because God is the LORD. All human beings are made in His image; Christ died for everyone of us. And yet people do make fun of the disabled and even attack them, sometimes just for kicks, sometimes for personal gain. Such things do go on, even in families. Yet people deny the doctrine of original sin. We human beings are sinners & we do need to repent of our sins, to receive God's forgiveness and, by His grace, to amend our lives in conformity with His Will for us.

July 23<sup>rd</sup> (Trinity 7)

Genesis 27 vv 18-29

**LORD** of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Suppose people sincerely prayed this collect and the Lord heard our prayers. Who would be a sinner then? How could things like the events described in today's verses ever happen? We shan't see such perfection until Christ comes again in glory to judge both the quick and the dead, but the mission of the Church, our mission as Christians, is to do our bit to advance the fulfilment of our Lord's prayer: *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.*

I'm particularly disgusted by Jacob's claim that the LORD helped him to find the venison. Isaac is suspicious, but Jacob manages to convince him. Surely, Isaac perhaps thinks, my younger son wouldn't betray me his father and his older brother. I'm not altogether surprised that he's taken in by the stew. You may remember the old Stork Challenge Test in which members of the public were asked to discern between butter and Stork margarine. Many failed, I believe because the margarine or butter was served with a helping of some other flavoursome spread, Put enough herbs and spices in the casserole and a lot of people wouldn't know whether it was venison or goat. And as for wine connoisseurs?

July 24<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 27 vv 30-40

The name Jacob means *one who takes the heel* as this Jacob did literally when the twins were born. Metaphorically, the word means *supplanter*. He overreaches, overtakes, takes what is properly his older brother's. Jacob is not a nice boy, but everything happens within the providence of God so that Jacob's descendants, the Israelites, inhabit the Promised Land, where one of those descendants, Jesus, will be born, the Saviour of the world.

July 25<sup>th</sup> (St James)

Genesis 27 vv 41-56

**GRANT**, O merciful God, that as thine holy Apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

Esau, the passionate one, resolves to kill his supplanting brother.

Rebekah now takes advantage of Esau's unsatisfactory matrimonial arrangements to provide a pretext for Jacob to make himself scarce for a bit. Rebekah thinks it will be just for a few days, but it will, in fact be many years, before Jacob returns to the Holy Land.

The apostle James was also mercurial like Esau. Jesus surnamed him & his brother John Boanerges – sons of thunder. It was those two who wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritan village which wouldn't let Jesus pass through, prompting Him to rebuke them: *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them*. It was also James and

John who tried to book thrones either side of Jesus in the Kingdom of Heaven. He answered (Mark 10): Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? <sup>39</sup> And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: <sup>40</sup> But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. <sup>41</sup> And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. <sup>42</sup> But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. <sup>43</sup> But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: <sup>44</sup> And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

James eventually suffered a martyr's death. We don't know what ultimately happened to Esau, but, even the hasty, can eventually get things right and follow Jesus Who promised that where He is, there will be His servants also.

July 26<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 28 vv 1-9

Jacob needs to get away from Esau. He also needs a wife of his own people and faith. So, off he goes with Isaac's blessing, to Haran where his people come from. Esau then tries to get back into his parents' good books by marrying a daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's other son, his father's half brother, who hopefully also believed that the LORD is God & He alone. In later times, the Church would discourage and forbid marriages between close relatives – a discipline which is said to have improved the health of the population considerably from the Middle Ages onwards. The Church also forbade polygamy which seems to have been allowed in these early times, but was never ideal. The ideal always was one man, one wife, cloven together in unconditional love, till parted by death.

July 27<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 28 vv 10-15

Imagine how lonely Jacob must have been. He had left his family behind him. He was alone in an immense landscape in which he might

encounter hostile tribesmen or dangerous wild animals, in which he might go without food and water. Above him, the heavens - the moon and the stars with the planets apparently hanging in a pitch black sky. He could not know what lay before him. And God vouchsafed to him this wonderful experience in which He promised that He would be with Jacob and that God's promises would be fulfilled in him.

1 O God of Bethel, by whose hand

thy people still are fed,  
who through this weary pilgrimage  
hast all our fathers led;

2 Our vows, our prayers, we  
now present  
before thy throne of grace;  
God of our fathers, be the God  
of their succeeding race.

3 Through each perplexing  
path of life  
our wandering footsteps guide;  
give us each day our daily  
bread,  
and raiment fit provide.

4 O spread thy covering wings  
around  
till all our wanderings cease,  
and at our Father's loved abode  
our souls arrive in peace.

July 28<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 28 vv 16-22

Bethel means *House of God*. Jacob worships the LORD Who has appeared to Him on this spot. God is with us everywhere and we can always talk to Him in prayer. In fact we are temples of the Holy Spirit. And yet we can still value holy places, houses of prayer, where sometimes we may feel the Presence of God more deeply than ordinarily.

Jacob promises to tithe, to give back to God  $\frac{1}{10}$ <sup>th</sup> of what God gives to Him. We owe God everything that we have, everything we are. In principle, our calling is to offer to Him our whole lives and all that we have. *All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee* (I Chronicles 29<sup>14</sup>). It's good, however, to have a guide as to how much of our income we should give back to God. It's not a trivial amount, what we have over when we've paid for all the material things we need and desire, but neither would it impoverish most of us.

July 29<sup>th</sup>

John 1vv 43-51

Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets. Jacob's experience at Bethel prefigures the even more wonderful truth about Jesus. Jacob saw



heaven opened with a ladder connecting the dwelling place of God to the earth, a ladder with angels ascending and descending between earth and heaven. Jesus – human and divine, the Word made flesh, Son of God and Son of Man – is the essential connection between heaven and earth. He makes God known to us. He pours out His Holy Spirit upon us. Our prayers ascend to God through Him. It is through Him that we shall at last take our places in Heaven.

July 30<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 8)

Genesis 29 vv 1-14

We're reminded of the importance of access to water. The community comes together to water the flocks. There's a heaven stone to cover the mouth of the well, presumably to prevent the water being stolen. Jacob performs the service of removing the stone when one of the people coming to water her flocks proves to be the daughter of the man he is going to see. We may think that God had a hand in bringing Jacob to the right place at the right time, as He guides & sustains all our lives. **O GOD**, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

July 31<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 29 vv 15-20

Jacob becomes a member of Laban's household. He makes his home with his kin. He's not a hired servant, still less a slave. He is promised that, after seven years working for Laban, he will be allowed to marry the woman he loves, Laban's younger daughter. We're not told what Rachel thought about this or what choice she had. It seems to have been a love match for both of them. If you were a young man in the present day, however, you wouldn't expect to have to work for your prospective father in law for seven years before you could marry the woman of your dreams. An independent young woman would expect to marry the man she chose at the time she & he both agreed. That seems to me a much better world than the one in which Jacob and Rachel courted. On the other hand, today two independent minded young people might expect to move in together before they were married, maybe with no intention of ever marrying. That's not so good. Behaving in that manner devalues the significance of the committed relationships which are the foundation of family life.

August 1<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 29 vv 21-30

So Jacob who cheated his father and his brother is now cheated by his uncle. We're not told what the four women involved thought about all this. Did Leah too love Jacob? Was she just desperate for a husband? Was Laban concerned to provide for her? Rachel must have been disappointed when her sister supplanted her. And what about the handmaids? Did they feel honoured to become the mothers of their mistress' children or did they feel violated? We can only speculate. They lived in a world very different from ours, but we do know that in all ages all people should be treated with respect.

August 2<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 29 vv 31-35

Leah was evidently treated unfairly. Jacob took out his frustration with what Laban had done by hating Leah. Rachel was probably less than happy with her older sister. But God blessed Leah. When it seems that everybody else is against us, even the people we ought to be able to rely on, we can still turn to God.

1 What a friend we have in  
Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
ev'rything to him in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
ev'rything to God in prayer!

2 Have we trials and  
temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be  
discouraged:  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Can we find a friend so faithful,

who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our ev'ry  
weakness -  
take it to the Lord in prayer!

3 Are we weak and heavy-  
laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Jesus only is our refuge,  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do thy friends despise,  
forsake thee?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In his arms he'll take and  
shield thee,  
thou wilt find a solace there.

August 3<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 30 vv 1-21

As with Sarah and Hagar, so Rachel encourages her husband to have children by her handmaid. She's very vexed because she is unable to have children herself and has been in conflict with her sister over the issue. It has been commented that, although men seem to have been

permitted to have more than one wife in those days, it very often led to an unhappy household.

The women wanted children both because they would love their babies and their babies would love them and because they feared that their husbands would not love them if they couldn't give them children, especially sons. Hence these jealousies and conflicts within Jacob's household and the desperate measures they were prepared to go to. Mandrakes are love plants, considered in ancient times to be aphrodisiac and to promote fertility.

August 4<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 30 vv 22-30

The wife Jacob really loved was at last able to give him a son. Now he was ready to return home to the Promised Land. Jacob has done well for Laban. He has looked after the sheep very effectively and contributed considerably to the prosperity of the household. Laban does not want him to leave, but it is time. The promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was that they should inherit the Promised Land. The two men agree on a division of the flocks between them. Laban is to have the white sheep and goats and Jacob the marked ones. There is an English breed of sheep with dark markings called Jacob's sheep. Laban, it appears, then took away the marked rams and he goats with the intention that the lambs and kids should all be white and therefore remain with him. It didn't work out like that, however. Jacob was smarter than Laban and God was with him. Not only did spotted kids and lambs continue to be born, Jacob was able to ensure that these were the most robust animals of the flocks. Jacob prospered at the expense of his uncle and father in law Laban. Laban and Jacob were both twisters. Laban kept changing the terms of their agreement – which sheep and goats each should have – but God was with Jacob in accordance with the promise and the covenant God had made with Abraham.

August 5<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 31 vv 1-16

Laban's sons are unhappy that Jacob now possesses a lot of what they had expected to inherit. Laban himself turns against the nephew he had attempted to cheat but who had outsmarted him. Laban's daughters felt

that they had been let down by their father. It really was time to go. “I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.” God Himself tells Jacob to go home. God reminds Jacob of the experience he had had at Bethel all those years ago. We can trust God’s promises. When we are now feeling low and perhaps feeling distant from God, we can fall back on our previous experiences of God. The memory of them reassures us of God’s dependable care for us. We can also fall back on the experiences of God that other Christians have had and shared with us. And indeed on the wonderful story of the people of God recorded in Scripture and in the history of the Church.

August 6<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 9 / the Transfiguration)

Genesis 31 vv 17-24

It’s not surprising, under the circumstances, that Jacob took his family and his goods and fled. It is surprising that Rachel stole her father’s images – surprising that Laban had images and surprising that Rachel wanted them. After all, Abraham’s family had originally left Ur of the Chaldees to get away from idolatry. The reality is that for centuries people compromised – claiming to follow the LORD, but still superstitious, claiming to be God’s people, but only too often behaving as badly as or worse than the pagans around them. Can we honestly say that our *religion is pure and undefiled before God and the Father* (James 1<sup>27</sup>)? Are we *blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we shine as lights in the world* (Philippians 2<sup>15</sup>)? Christ is the image of God, the only true image of God, the only permissible image of God. He manifested Himself with Moses and Elijah to the apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration. He manifested Himself to the world on the Cross. He makes Himself known in so many ways to the end that, knowing Him, we may become like Him and recover our true nature as made in the image of God Who is love.

**GRANT** to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 31 vv 25-35

Laban and his sons could travel faster than Jacob, who had his womenfolk and children, flocks and herds and all his goods with him. How sincere was Laban in saying that he would like to have known that Jacob was leaving so that he could depart with a blessing and a party? Jacob didn't know that Rachel had stolen Laban's idols. She told a lie in order not to get caught. We hear no more of these idols in the bible story. It is apt that in order to remain undetected as a thief, Rachel told a lie. Idols are false gods. They deceive. The devil is the father of lies. Psalm 115: 4. Their idols are silver and gold : even the work of men's hands. 5. They have mouths, and speak not : eyes have they, and see not. 6. They have ears, and hear not : noses have they, and smell not. 7. They have hands, and handle not; feet have they, and walk not : neither speak they through their throat. 8. They that make them are like unto them ; and so are all such as put their trust in them.

August 8<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 31 vv 36&37

It was understandable that Jacob was angry to be accused of stealing the idols. He knew nothing about that! When we pray for prisoners, I keep it in mind that there are prisoners of conscience, prisoners who were wrongly convicted of crimes they did not commit and prisoners being justly punished for what they have done wrong. They all need our prayers – that they may be humanely treated and kept safe. Prisoners of conscience need our prayers that their witness to the truth may be effective and their courage result in a fair hearing for what they stand for and for their freedom. Those falsely convicted we ought to pray for their vindication and release. Those justly suffering punishment need our prayers for their reformation & rehabilitation and their victims need our prayers and support too.

August 9<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 31 vv 38-42

There were also many things Jacob knew about in which Laban had mistreated him. What he means about not bringing torn beasts to Laban is that shepherds were liable for any animals missing from the flock. (There must have been a temptation for poor shepherds to take home a lamb for the family supper or, more egregiously, to sell one or two.) However, if the shepherd could produce a partly eaten carcase, obviously killed by a wolf, the owner had to accept the loss and the shepherd was not liable. Jacob is saying that he didn't exercise that

right even when he could have done. The prophet Amos warns the rich people in Israel who were indifferent to the hardships endured by the poor (Amos 3<sup>12</sup>): *Thus saith the LORD; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch.* All that would be left of those who got fat at the expense of those going hungry would be the proof of their demise.

August 10<sup>th</sup> (St Laurence)

Genesis 31 vv 43&44

Property. The Roman Emperor Valerian had the pope executed and demanded that Laurence give him the church's treasure. Laurence gave the Church's treasure to the poor and then presented the poor these were the Church's true treasure, "Here are the treasures of the church. You see, the church is truly rich, far richer than your emperor!"

August 11<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 31 vv 45-55

Jacob and Laban come to an agreement. They will not harm one another. Jacob will be a good husband and father to Laban's daughters and the children. I can't quite decide whether they resolve to be friends and to respect one another from now on or just agree to keep out of one another's way. Perhaps it was a bit of both. I can't help being reminded of a couple of New Testament texts, however. I Timothy 6<sup>10</sup>: *For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* Luke 12<sup>15</sup>: *Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* Wouldn't both men have got on better if they'd been less materialistic.

Some of you may remember how the single word was Mizpah was treasured by couples in love when a man had to go to war and the woman remained at home. *The LORD watch between thee and me, when we are absent one from another.*

August 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 32 vv 1&2

We can't usually see angels. They exist in a different dimension from the one in which we live. Angels are created beings as we are. They

exist to worship God and to serve Him as we do. They sing His praises in Heaven as we shall. They assist in God's purposes on earth in ways of which we can only catch a glimpse. They act as God's messengers. They stand for and stand up for people (especially children), for churches and for nations. We can't understand the mystery of angels, but we can know that an aspect of their ministry is God's care for us.

August 13<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 10)

Genesis 32 vv 3 -12

Rightly or wrongly, Jacob thought it likely that Esau still bore him ill will over what had happened twenty years previously. So Jacob prayed to God. In his prayer, he confessed his own unworthiness of God's grace. He thankfully remembered everything that God had done for him. Everything he had was God's gift to him. He remembered God's promises to him. He was able to say to God that he was trying to do His will in returning to Canaan. A model for us when we pray.

August 14<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 32 vv 13-23

Jacob's strategy was to appease Esau with a gift. He divided the gift into three, thinking that it would have more effect that way than just sending one big gift. Why do we give gifts? Sometimes we give someone a gift because he or she is obviously in need. There can be some embarrassment about gifts like this both on the part of the donor and of the recipient. It is important to preserve respect for one another and to ensure that both parties keep their dignity intact. We often give gifts just because we love people – such as Christmas or birthday presents. This can be difficult if the person doesn't really need or want anything. If people are trying to de-clutter, they may not be grateful to be given more clutter. On the other hand, *it is the thought that counts*. It might be hurtful not to give anything to someone who is expecting a present. It's awkward too if you are poorer than the person you want to give a gift to. You might feel they won't value anything you can afford. But, again, it ought to be the thought that counts. Hopefully, the recipient values your love and your desire to show it more than the monetary price of the gift. *Let all things be done in love*. Then there are gifts like Jacob's gifts – presents intended to secure someone's favour. Flowers for your Valentine? An apple for the teacher? A box at Wimbledon for a potential client? The offer of a well-paid job to the

council planning officer who approved your planning application? At what point do gifts like Jacob's become sordid? We're on purer ground when gift giving is the product of disinterested love. *Freely ye have received, freely give.*

August 15<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 32 vv 24-32

I was brought up to believe that prayer is straightforward and easy. God is always with us. He knows our thoughts. When we consciously direct our thoughts towards Him, we pray. We can pray absolutely anywhere, just as readily as we can pray in church. We can use special words, the words of the Bible or our prayerbooks; or prayers that other people have composed; prayers we have been taught; our own words; or no words at all. Even though we may feel that we are unable to pray or that we don't know how to pray or what to say to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit pray for us and on behalf of us. But some people, like Jacob, do wrestle with God in prayer. God seems far away. His ways appear incomprehensible. The load is heavy. In that case, the thing to do is what Jacob did – not to let go of God. There will be a blessing. PTO.

**LET** thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 16<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 33 vv 1-20

This is another example of a story I don't quite know how to take. On the face of it, it would appear that Esau has totally forgotten and forgiven everything that had happened before between the two brothers and is rejoicing to see his twin again, to meet his sisters in law and nephews and to celebrate Jacob's prosperity. On the other hand, Jacob doesn't seem entirely to trust Esau. He doesn't want to travel with him. He doesn't even want Esau's companions to join his caravan. If Jacob ever did catch up with Jacob on Mt Seir, the Bible doesn't say so. My own personal belief is that the incident reflects the personalities of the two brothers – Esau open and generous, but careless and irresponsible; Jacob a man with a plan, driven, dutiful, calculating, distrustful, scheming even. Maybe, if they'd lived a millennium and a half later here in England Esau would have been a cavalier and Jacob a



roundhead. Like would be dull without cavaliers but anarchic without roundheads. I'm sure I would have like Esau better as a man to go down the pub with, but God chose Jacob – before the twins were born, before the world was made.

August 17<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 34 vv 1-19

Young people fall in love. Shechem was apparently smitten by Dinah. We're not told how she felt about the matter. Shechem wanted to marry Dinah. In many cultures, he would have been expected to marry her – especially if a child was conceived. Shechem's family were very happy for the marriage to go ahead. It would create an alliance with the prosperous Israelites. The way Jacob's sons looked at it, however, was that Dinah had been defiled by sleeping with a pagan. There's no suggestion of rape or prostitution, but it may be that initially she had little choice. Perhaps she was naive or too much in love to think through the consequences of what she was consenting to. Her prospects of marriage to anyone else would have been seriously damaged. The real issue, I think, is that Jacob's sons didn't want their sister marrying out, marrying someone who wasn't one of The LORD's people.

August 18<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 34 vv 20-31

*The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor deceitfully, and said because he had defiled Dinah their sister.* Two wrongs don't make a right. It seems to me that what Levi and Simeon did to the Shechemites and their town was a very nasty trick. It was a crafty way to weaken the opposition and increase their chance of victory, but even so. It was important to preserve the distinctiveness of the Israelites and the purity of their worship of the one, true God. Intermarriage with pagans was one of the many ways in which the Israelites might be led astray and compromise their allegiance to the LORD. If all the Israelites had compromised with paganism, would God's revelation of Himself to them even have survived until the Birth of Jesus? If we compromise our Christian beliefs and values because we live in a multicultural and largely secular world, do we run the risk of so diluting the treasure which God gave to us in Christ that Christian faith becomes meaningless? Or do we resist, perhaps as a potentially persecuted minority? I cannot think that our resistance to assimilation could

involve us in deceit, treachery and violence in imitation of Simeon and Levi.

August 19<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 35 vv 1-5

What do you do with old bibles when they are falling to pieces and can no longer be read? What do I do with the consecrated bread and wine which is not required for the communion of the faithful? Or left over anointing oil, or worn out vestments? I've known a couple of occasions when people have been given items blessed by well-meaning people, but which have seemed to be more a matter of superstition than faith. The recipients weren't comfortable using them but didn't quite like to treat them as rubbish. What about battle worn regimental standards? How do we dispose of them? And scout banners? What about human remains? We dispose of those of people we know with reverence. But what about the bones of people who have been dead for hundreds, even thousands, of years. Can they be treated as archaeological specimens to be put on display or experimented on? Or do they still deserve respect? Some people would regard treating any of the above as somehow holy or deserving of special respect as superstition, but, for others, it would be disrespectful or sacrilegious not to treat them with reverence.

August 20<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 11)

Genesis 35 vv 6-8

Rebekah's nurse, Deborah, was obviously an important person to her. She had accompanied Deborah when, as a young woman, she had left her home in Haran to travel with Eleazar to the Promised Land in order to marry Isaac. She would have been a wet nurse. In those days, children were weaned when they were toddlers. So Deborah and Rebekah would have been very close in those early years and Deborah's friendship with the family continued until she died, presumably at a great age. It's good to think of that closeness.

**O GOD**, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

21<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 35 vv 9-15

If you are a parent, how did you go about choosing names for your children? Perhaps you named them after someone you admired. Maybe you liked the sound of a particular name. Some people go into what names are supposed to mean and choose something which they think will be appropriate. Florence Nightingale was so called because she was born in Florence. Some names give away your age, your background, your religion even. Giving someone a nickname may be a sign of affection or a term of abuse. Calling people names is unkind. *A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold. The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all.* Names matter. The name that matters above all names is the Name of Jesus. What matters therefore to us is our Christian Name – that we belong to Jesus.

August 22<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 35 vv 16-20

Rachel called her son Benoni, son of my sorrow, because she died in childbirth. Jacob gave him the more positive name Benjamin, son of his right hand or old age. They will still show you what is believed to be the site of Rachel's tomb near Bethlehem. That's why Herod's massacre of the Innocents is described as Rachel weeping for her children, a reference back to the sorrows of Israel in the time of Jeremiah.

August 23<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 35 vv 21-26

Hundreds of years on, the rebel Absalom takes his father King David's concubines on the roof top of the palace as a demonstration to dishonour the King and establish his own claim to rule Israel. Hundreds of years after that, Amos will condemn the Israelites because father & son sleep with the same maid. Hundreds of years more and St Paul will describe what Reuben did as a particularly vile sin. According to the *Times*, this kind of conduct is very popular on contemporary internet porn sites. Human behaviour can be disgustingly bad and it seems that the human race never learns. King David himself says in Psalm 51: 5. *Behold, I was shapen in wickedness : and in sin hath my mother conceived me.* This followed his adultery with the wife of Uriah and his subsequent conspiracy to get Uriah killed. There is a remedy – and only one remedy – that we turn to God in faithful

repentance. *7. Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

August 24<sup>th</sup> (St Bartholomew)

Genesis 35 vv 27-29

**O ALMIGHTY** and everlasting God, who didst give to thine Apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach thy Word; Grant, we beseech thee, unto thy Church, to love that Word which he believed, and both to preach and receive the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

We know the remedy for human sin, as did Bartholomew. Like him, we are bound to share what we know. As St Paul says, *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.* We know the Truth. The Truth sets us free, free to serve Him Whose service is perfect freedom. Freely we have received. Freely we must give – the good news of eternal life.

There is a tendency for people to emphasise sexual sin, but there are many kinds of sin. Wherever love fails, there is sin. Esau and Jacob had failed in brotherly love. They had failed to honour their father and their mother. It is good to see that they were reconciled at least in this last office.

August 25<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 36 vv 1-43

You may or may not want to study the detail of this chapter. The long term consequence is that the descendants of Jacob lived mainly in the land we now call Israel and the western part of Jordan. Their cousins, the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, lived in the mountains to the east of the Israelites where subsequently the city of Petra would be built. Petra is very close to a copious spring which still supplies water to a large town. This is said to be the place where Moses struck the rock and it is also the site of the reputed tombs of Moses' brother Aaron and sister Miriam, but all that was hundreds of years in the future at the time of today's reading. There was always a tense relationship between the Edomites and the Israelites as there often is within families, but they still were family. I once camped in the land which had been home to

the Edomites. We looked across the Dead Sea at the lights in Israel and an Arab (descendant of Ishmael?) said to me, “Those are our brothers over there.” **BEHOLD**, *how good and joyful a thing it is : brethren, to dwell together in unity!* (Psalm 133). But so often we don’t. There were terrible wars in the Middle East in biblical times and there are terrible wars there today, as there are in so many parts of the world. St Paul speaks of the whole of humanity being made by God of one blood, one family (Acts 17). We are all brothers and sisters. If only we would dwell together in unity.

August 26<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 37 vv 1-4

Sibling rivalry. That tension again between members of the same family. They love one another. They are jealous of one another. They sometimes fight like cat & dog. Yet, in the end, they belong to one another. Blood is generally thicker than water, but *better is a neighbour that is near than a brother that is far off* and *there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*. It is generally agreed that parents who favour one child over another are unwise. Family is very important. I do believe in the traditional family in which a man leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife in a lifelong relationship of unconditional love, one of whose purposes is the procreation of children and their nurture in the fear of the LORD. We cannot always attain to it, but that is the gold standard. The other avenue open to us is to live a single and celibate life if that is God’s calling.

August 27<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 12)

Genesis 37 vv 5-11

**ALMIGHTY** and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire, or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. *Amen.*

Joseph being treated as the favourite not only provoked his brothers’ jealousy, but it also had a bad effect on his own character, making him feel more important than the rest of the family, even their parents.

Where can we find wisdom, wisdom in the care of our families, wisdom in our work, wisdom in the ways in which we live our lives, wisdom for our Church?

Some people find these these collects a great source of inspiration. Think for a moment about the words of the collect for today. We only too often neglect prayer, but God is always listening, ready to assist and guide us in our lives. He gives us greater gifts than we can even conceive of (*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, Neither have entered into the heart of man, The things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*) He is certainly far more generous to us than we deserve. We definitely need His forgiveness for our mistakes and sins, forgiveness which is freely given. We couldn't live without what He gives us. He gives us every good thing that we have. We're not worthy to ask for His love, but we have His love through our Lord's merits and mediation.

August 28<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 37 vv 12-17

The school leaving age is now eighteen. We are very protective of our young people. Teenagers are treated as children. Yet my grandparents left school and went to work at fourteen. I could have left school at fifteen, though I stayed on for "O" & "A" levels. Joseph is sent off wandering on his own to find his brothers. Not only in biblical times, but much more recently, we find teenagers in very responsible positions. I read an account of an incident in the 1950s when a sixteen year old boy single-handedly manned a sailing barge in a terrific storm. There is a danger of being too protective of people & stifling their ability to express themselves and do their bit for society.

August 29<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 37 vv 18-36

This was wicked. Reuben tried to save Joseph, but things didn't work out the way he intended. Nevertheless, in the Providence of God, Joseph's life was saved. The nine were saved from murdering their brother, but they were evil enough to sell him into slavery and to break their father's heart by feigning Joseph's death. The point of the story is that God accomplishes His purposes despite our human wickedness. Joseph, having learnt some important lessons, was in the right place at the right time. When the famine came, Joseph was the wise man already in Egypt who saved not only his own people, but also the Egyptians and people in the surrounding lands.

Psalms 105: 16. Moreover, he called for a dearth upon the land : and destroyed all the provision of bread. 17. But he had sent a man before them : even Joseph, who was sold to be a bond-servant; 18. Whose feet they hurt in the stocks : the iron entered into his soul; 19. Until the time came that his cause was known : the word of the Lord tried him. 20. The king sent, and delivered him : the prince of the people let him go free. 21. He made him lord also of his house : and ruler of all his substance; 22. That he might inform his princes after his will : and teach his senators wisdom. 23. Israel also came into Egypt : and Jacob was a stranger in the land of Ham.

August 30<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 38 vv 1-30

Again, you might not want to dwell on this story in all its sordid detail. It is, however, Holy Scripture and I did not want to gloss over it entirely. The point of the story is that Tamar became a member of Judah's household when she married his son Er. When Er died, Judah was responsible for her and she was entitled to marry his second son Onan. When that went wrong & Onan died, Judah was still responsible for Tamar. (Onan might have had another wife who could have given him sons, but any son Tamar gave him would have been the heir of the dead Er, which Onan didn't want, perhaps because it would have reduced his share of Judah's estate when the time came.) When Judah failed in his duty to provide her with a husband a third time, she resorted to trickery to force him to accept his responsibilities. So Tamar became a mother, albeit in very unsatisfactory circumstances, and was provided for. Besides Mary, there are only four women mentioned by St Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus. Tamar is one of them, Rahab the harlot, Ruth & the wife of Uriah with whom David committed adultery are the others, which does make you think. Ruth's presence at night in Boaz's threshing floor was something which could have given rise to scandal. There were those, including Joseph until an angel put him right, who doubted the virtue even of Mary.

August 31<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 39 vv 1-6

There has been a lot about the Slave Trade recently in public discourse. The transatlantic Slave Trade was a horror, a deep stain on human history. It is wrong, however, to think that those terrible centuries (16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>) in which millions of Africans were taken prisoner and transported in horrifying conditions to be harshly worked in the

Americas were unique. Slavery has existed in many forms at one time or another throughout human history and in most countries in the world. Sometimes, slaves have been worked to death. Sometimes, like Joseph, they have been able to enjoy relatively comfortable lives. But they have always lacked freedom. Their fate has been in the hands of others. Slavery for many was a fact of life in biblical times. The Bible mitigates the worst of slavery, demanding that slaves be treated decently, but it was not until the fourth century AD that the Christian theologian Gregory of Nyssa laid down the reasons why slavery is wrong in principle, however kind and generous the master. Gregory sharply denounces the practice of enslaving a person who bears the image of God as immoral and contrary to God's intentions for humanity. The transatlantic Slave Trade deserves all the condemnation it is currently receiving, but we mustn't forget that the abuse of slavery was and is very much more widespread than that.

### September 1<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 39 vv 7-23

It does happen that women fall for men who don't want them or who are not in a position to reciprocate their feelings. It is also true that sometimes women make false allegations. Probably much more often, women have spoken the truth about being assaulted by men and have not been believed. It is very difficult when there were only two people present and they give very different accounts of what happened. Does the principle *innocent till proved guilty* provide a cloak for some very wicked people or is it the only thing standing between an innocent man and conviction for a horrible crime he didn't commit?

### September 2<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 40 vv 1-23

That it may please thee to bless and keep the Magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice, and to maintain truth; *We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

We ought to pray for those responsible for the administration of justice. Joseph was clearly wrongly convicted. The butler and the baker had clearly offended Pharaoh in some way. Were they accused of actual wrong-doing or crimes, fairly tried, the one vindicated, the other condemned? Or was Pharaoh merely acting on whim – a very powerful man, holding the power of life and death, but effectively answerable to



no-one? It is vitally important that rulers too are subject to the Law – to the Law of the land, to the Law of God.

Joseph is learning wisdom. This is why he prospered in the house of Potiphar and why he became a trusted assistant to his gaoler. This wisdom, which is tightly bound up with the fear of the LORD, enables him to interpret Pharaoh's servants' dreams and then Pharaoh's own dreams, putting him in the position to become a wise viceroy who will know what to do to prepare for the coming famine.

September 3<sup>rd</sup> (Trinity 13

Genesis 41 vv 1-7

3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 was a Sunday and many people first learnt that we were at war when they were in church. It was a time to pray, a time to be attentive to the Word of God. Many went home to be with their families and to put their affairs in order. In the lead up to War, there were many who believed that war wouldn't happen, that another world war couldn't be allowed to happen after the horrors of 14-18. Some, however, like Winston Churchill discerned the signs of the times and urged the nation to prepare for what was to come. In today's reading God grants Pharaoh warning of what has to be prepared for, In our own uncertain times I pray that God will raise up wise people to discern the signs of the times and to advise us what we must do- and that we have the grace to listen!

**ALMIGHTY** and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 4<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 41 v8

Pharaoh was troubled, as many people are troubled today, but he turned to the wrong people to guide him, to the magicians and so-called wise men of Egypt. To whom should we turn when we seek understanding? Plenty of celebrities are ready with their nostrums. People set themselves up as gurus. Politicians may claim that they have all the answers. There are commentators appearing on TV and radio, writing in the newspapers or expressing their thoughts on the internet. There are

plenty of people telling us how we ought to think, what we might say and how we should behave. How do we know whom to trust, what advice to follow? *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.* Pray. Read God's Word. Consider the teaching of the Church. Use your God-given reason to examine the evidence and to debate with others. Don't be seduced by those who reject solid subjects like Science, Medicine, Mathematics, academic disciplines, etc., in favour of subjectivity – *my truth*, rather than the Truth – or an irresponsible tolerance of just about anything. Use your common sense and ask God to help you to make sense of the world. Be open to new ideas. Never cancel people who disagree with you. Never stifle debate. But be sensible. *Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged* (Isaiah 51<sup>1</sup>.)

September 5<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 41 vv 9-13

The butler owed Joseph a lot. Joseph had asked him to intercede for him when he was restored to his position. *Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.* Perhaps the butler didn't like thinking about his time in prison. Maybe he was just very busy. Perhaps he was simply careless. It's only too easy to forget what other people have done for us and what we owe to them. Some people do very well for themselves, leaving home, college, a good job and forget their families, even become ashamed of their humble origins.

It's also only too easy to forget what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

It is a thing most wonderful,  
almost too wonderful to be,  
that God's own Son should  
come from heaven,  
and die to save a child like me.

I cannot tell how he would love  
a child so weak and full of sin;  
his love must be most  
wonderful,  
if he could die my love to win.

And yet I know that it is true:  
he chose a poor and humble  
lot,  
and wept, and toiled, and  
mourned, and died,  
for love of those who loved him  
not.

I sometimes think about the  
cross,  
and shut my eyes, and try to  
see  
the cruel nails and crown of  
thorns  
and Jesus crucified for me.

But even could I see him die,  
I could but see a little part  
of that great love, which, like a  
fire,  
is always burning in his heart.

It is most wonderful to know  
his love for me so free and  
sure;  
but 'tis more wonderful to see

my love for him so faint and  
poor.

And yet I want to love thee,  
Lord;  
O light the flame within my  
heart,  
and I will love thee more and  
more,  
until I see thee as thou art.

September 6<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 41 v14

I like this touch. There was Joseph in the prison. He was the keeper of the prison's blue-eyed boy, but nevertheless he was a prisoner and had to spruce himself up a bit before entering the King of Egypt's presence.

We talk about Sunday best – the clothes people might put on to go to the house of the King of Kings. They may make a point of dressing nicely in order to show their respect for God. Some perhaps dress to impress other people. Pride is a sin, but dressing nicely for other people can also be a sign of respect for them. On the other hand, some people have been put off going to church because they are too poor to dress nicely and feel looked down on. If we do look down on people because they can't afford to dress up, we are very wrong. James 2: <sup>1</sup>*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.* <sup>2</sup>*For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;* <sup>3</sup>*And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:* <sup>4</sup>*Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*

<sup>5</sup>*Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?* And I have heard of people who could afford to dress up for church but prefer to stay at home because they have to dress formally for work all the week and like to lounge around at weekends.

What really matters of course is what we are like inside. What do we really have to do in order to prepare ourselves to come into the Presence of the King of Kings? Think about everything which God has done for you and be thankful. Confess your sins (your failures to love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself). Put right what you have done wrong if you can. Forgive those who have wronged you and be reconciled with them if at all possible. Be ready to receive what God is saying to you in the readings and sermon. Prepare to receive Him in the Sacrament. As you pray, listen to God. Expect to encounter God in your fellow worshippers.

September 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 41 vv 15&16

*It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer.*

At His Last Supper, Jesus said to His disciples: *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.* There is nothing we can do without God. Just as branches broken off the vine would die, so should we without Jesus. The vine draws up water and various nutrients from the earth. The buds open and the leaves receive the light of the sun, turning it by the process of photosynthesis into the sugars and starch which sustain the vine and enable it to grow. In due course, blossoms appear and, when fertilised, the grapes grow. Cut off from the vine, there would be no leaves, no growth, no life, no flowers, no fruit. We are utterly dependent on God for all our achievements. It follows that we ought not to boast or to think too highly of ourselves. Give God the glory. It also follows that we must abide in Him and He in us, that we keep close to Christ in prayer, in reading the Scriptures, in the fellowship of the Church and in that consciousness that we walk with Him and He in us every hour of our daily lives.

September 8<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 41 vv 17-32

We plough the fields, and  
scatter the good seed on the  
land;  
But it is fed and watered by  
God's almighty hand:  
He sends the snow in winter,

the warmth to swell the grain,  
The breezes and the sunshine,  
and soft refreshing rain.  
*All good gifts around us  
Are sent from heaven above,  
Then thank the Lord, O thank*

*the Lord*

*For all His love.*

We shall soon be singing this hymn at our Harvest Festival services. Harvest doesn't seem to be anymore what it was – a time when the Church was full of beautifully displayed produce, flowers, hops, corn and people. Perhaps, it is part of the general decline in religion in this country. Maybe it is the fact that fewer and fewer of us are actually involved in growing food. We rely on it being on the shelves in the shops at prices we can afford and we're apt to look for someone to blame if it isn't. There's also the point that, if we want to help other people who don't have enough to eat, it's much more practical to donate tins and packets than fresh food which we can't always get to the people who need it in good condition & promptly.

But we ought not to forget that, *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no shadow of turning.* Pray for the growing crops and those who cultivate, process and distribute them. Be thankful. Be generous.

September 9<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 41 vv 33-36

*Let Pharaoh look out a man discrete and wise.*

Obviously this is talking about the need for someone to deal with the coming emergency in ancient Egypt, but isn't it true in the world today? Hasn't it been true in every generation. We need wise people to guide us as we confront the challenges which face us. In Psalm 74 (probably speaking of the destruction of the Temple and the Holy City of Jerusalem by the Babylonians) complains: *10. We see not our tokens, there is not one prophet more : no, not one is there among us, that understandeth any more.* Sometimes I feel like this when I contemplate with perplexity the plight of our world today: - religion apparently in decline; moral confusion, our long-standing certainties challenged daily; conflict in so many parts of the world, including now in Europe; chronic poverty and hardship in so many other parts of the world and on our own streets; terrible crimes committed daily; institutions that were once revered turning out to be helpless in the face of the tasks confronting us or even corrupt themselves; the threat of climate change and an unwillingness to repent of the consumerism which drives it. *There is not one prophet more : no, not one is there among us, that*

*understandeth any more.* I pray for prophets, for God to raise up people, whether from among the ranks of the clergy or academia or politics or perhaps people off the streets previously unknown and unrecognised, people who will discern the signs of the times and teach us what to do.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.* In Deuteronomy 18<sup>18</sup>, God promises Moses, *I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto the mall that I shall command him.* This is taken to mean Jesus. Ultimately, it is in abiding in Him & attending to His Word that we receive the wisdom to overcome the world.

September 10<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 14)

Genesis 41 vv 37-45

*Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?*

**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.

Pharaoh was clearly very impressed with Joseph. He had interpreted the dreams which had so troubled him. He had come up with a plan to deal with the coming catastrophe. Pharaoh made Joseph his second in command, his plenipotentiary in the land of Egypt. He gave him too the trappings of power – fine clothes and jewellery, a splendid chariot, a prestigious wife. The crowds were to bow the knee before Joseph. But why was Joseph so useful to Joseph – because he had a fine title, nice clothes, a lovely wife and the adulation of the multitude? No, it was because he had the Spirit of God. He had the virtues we pray for in the collect. I don't expect that you or I will be called upon to be viceroy of Egypt, but we can be filled with the Spirit of God, to live in faith & hope & love, loving God's Law in the station of life in which it has pleased Him to call us.

September 11<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 41 vv 46-52

We might think that it was obvious that during the seven years of plenty the thing to do was to store up food for the seven years of famine. Surely, it doesn't take an especially wise man, particularly noted for being filled with the Spirit of God to recognise that. But how often are we caught out, whether as individuals or as nations? We are caught

unprepared. We squander resources. We waste what God has given us. We fail to plan for the future and we fail to make ready. Now, I don't say to worry about tomorrow. Scripture tells us no to. Jesus tells us not to. God knows what we need before we ask Him. The best insurance, the only insurance, is to seek first the Kingdom of God. The Bible also warns us not to boast about our plans for years to come. James 4: <sup>13</sup> *Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.* <sup>14</sup> *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.* <sup>15</sup> *For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.* If, however, we receive God's gifts to us with thankful hearts, we will be good stewards of them, not wasting or squandering them, not carelessly allowing them to suffer damage. We'll look after them and make use of them prudently both for our own needs and for the needs of others.

### September 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 41 vv 53-57

Because God had given warning and Joseph had acted wisely, the Egyptians had enough food not only for themselves, but also for the surrounding nations. Egypt used to be famous for its grain exports and, hundreds of years after the time of Joseph, was a principal source of corn for imperial Rome. One of the things I learned when Russia invaded Ukraine was that the latter is a very important source of grain (as well other products such as cooking oil) for much of the world, including Egypt. The war in Ukraine was set to cause hardship in many other parts of the world and would have been worse still had there not been some agreement with the Russians to allow a certain amount of Ukrainian grain to be exported to where it was needed. War is folly. Is it also folly to become dependent on long and vulnerable supply chains? Ought we to be seeking to be more self-sufficient or is the future more global co-operation?

### September 13<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 42 vv 1-24

Benjamin was Joseph's full brother. Rachel, the preferred wife was their mother. Jacob's other sons' mothers were Leah and the two wives' maidservants. Benjamin was especially precious to Jacob as not only his youngest son but also the son of his favourite wife (who had died in childbirth) and the brother of the son presumed to be dead.

Joseph's brothers really did not expect to see him alive again. What with that and all his Egyptian finery, they failed even to recognise him, but he knew them and decided to teach them a lesson, a policy which would eventually lead to the whole family being reunited and living in Egypt.

September 14<sup>th</sup> (Holy Cross Day

Genesis 42 vv 25-38

*All these things are against me.*

Do you ever feel like this, that everything is against you? I must admit that I do sometimes. Everything seems to be on top of us. Whatever can go wrong does go wrong. And mostly, I must also admit, at least in my case the *things which are all against me* aren't really very important in the great scheme of things. There are people living in war zones, people unable to make ends meet, homeless people, prisoners, people persecuted for their faith.

A guy named Stavros asked if I knew when his name day came in the Christian year. Stavros is quite a common name among Greek speaking people. Do you know what it means? I didn't realise that Stavros is the modern version of the New Testament Greek word Stauros, which means Cross. So Stavros' name day is today.

Think about the Cross of Jesus, what He suffered. His Death is the sacrifice for all the sins of the world, including yours and mine. In His suffering, He shares in all the suffering of humanity. He understands us and sympathises with us in all our troubles, be they small or great. He sets us an example.

When I survey the wondrous cross  
on which the Prince of glory died,  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.

September 15<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 43 vv 1-14

*If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.*

Jacob was very unwilling to allow his sons to return to Egypt and take Benjamin with them. Joseph, he believed, was dead. Simeon was imprisoned in Egypt. But, what could he do? The famine continued.



They'd run out of corn for bread. Jacob had to let his sons return to Egypt and take Benjamin with them. *If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.* Jacob seems to be resigned to the possibility of losing more of his sons. Perhaps I am being unfair, but these words seem to me to be quite fatalistic. He hopes against hope. But surely he prayed. Whatever else we may or may not be able to do, we ought always to pray and to trust God for the outcome.

Today is Battle of Britain Day. How many parents 83 years ago felt like Jacob in today's reading? *If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.* War takes a terrible toll. Some of our soldiers, sailors and airmen were volunteers, some conscripts, but, apart from the minority who were pacifists, some of whom were conscientious objectors, most people acknowledged that it was necessary to fight the evil which was Nazism. Some were in the firing line. Many more were behind the lines, at home, worrying and praying. Let's all pray for peace throughout the world.

### September 16<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 43 vv 15-25

Joseph isn't finished with teasing them and punishing them. When you think about it, by the standards of the time, they got off lightly. They had sold their brother into slavery and now they were absolutely in his power. It's a horrible thing to be betrayed by a family member or by a friend you had trusted and nobody we know is likely to have done to us something so terrible as what Joseph's older brothers did to him.

Forgiveness is sometimes very far from easy, but, if we can't forgive, the effect on us is as bad as it is on the person who has wronged us.

*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.*

There was some food in Canaan and Jacob sent his sons with a present for the viceroy of Egypt. They weren't beggars. They took of what they had and offered it to the man with whom they were doing business.

### September (Trinity 15)

Genesis 43 vv 26-34

**KEEP**, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy: and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Joseph manages to find out the news from home without yet disclosing himself to his family. He has a hard job, however, not to let them see how he is affected by the appearance of his younger brother. After some apprehension on the part of the guests, they sit down to a convivial meal. I sometimes think it strange that Benjamin was given five times as much food as the rest of them. Surely he couldn't have eaten that much! Perhaps the servants were allowed to take the leftovers or maybe anything not eaten was given to the poor. Wasting food seems to me to be intrinsically wrong, especially in a world in which many people don't get enough to eat. In the modern world, producing food often requires a large energy input (eg glasshouses), chemical fertilisers and pesticides on growing crops, animal welfare issues in the production of meat, transportation over long distances by road, rail, ship or even by air. Then, if it isn't eaten, there is a mountain of waste to dispose of. And yet there are still people who are hungry. As much as 40% produced in the UK is wasted, most of that by households. We are doing something wrong!

18<sup>th</sup> September

Genesis 44 vv 1-5

*Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth?*

Joseph wouldn't have been reading the tealeaves in his cup, but it appears that he did use this special cup for what you might call magical purposes. We saw earlier in the story how even the religion of these patriarchs was not pure. They had those household gods, idols. You would expect superstition to die out in the face of both Religion & Science. A scientist examines the evidence logically and cannot but conclude that superstitions are unfounded. The religious person (who may of course also be a scientist) has faith in God. God orders all things in heaven and on earth. There is no place for superstition or magic. *Pray without ceasing.* Work with God to accomplish His purposes. *Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying.* Seek God's Will and align your will with His. Don't try to usurp God's & attempt to control His world by magic or superstition.

September 19<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 44 vv 6-34

Joseph has created a situation in which it appears that Benjamin is guilty of a serious insult to the hospitality of the Viceroy of Egypt. Apparently magnanimously, he tells the rest of them that they can go home, But Benjamin must stay and become Joseph's slave. This, he knows, they cannot do. Jacob would never forgive them if they went home without Benjamin. So Judah was compelled to confess all. The older brothers have had to admit their crimes, to Joseph and to themselves. Confession and repentance open the way to forgiveness and reconciliation.

September 20<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 45 vv 1-15

Joseph could no longer contain himself. Once Judah had confessed to the whole story, Joseph made himself known to his brothers. Now, Joseph is the wise man in all this. He was an unpleasant child, but, through what he has endured, he has learnt wisdom. An aspect of wisdom is to discern the Hand of Providence in the way things work out. Joseph had been very foolish as a child. His older brothers had been very wicked. Their parents too had been unwise. But, despite all this, everything is in the Hands of God. *God is working His purpose out.* We pray for grace to be working with Him, to be good people, but, in the end, our failures cannot thwart God's purposes. God is in charge, We pray *Thy Will be done*, and so it will be. Our prayer is that we may be His faithful partners in accomplishing His ends.

September 21<sup>st</sup> (St Matthew)

Genesis 45 vv 16-28

**O ALMIGHTY** God, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an Apostle and Evangelist; Grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

It struck me as something of a contrast that Pharaoh and Joseph send all those good things to Jacob in order to encourage him to come with all his household to live in Egypt, while Matthew leaves behind him *all covetous desires and inordinate love of riches* to follow Jesus. Jesus is, of course, the richest prize of all. To know Jesus is to have eternal life. It's not wrong to have good things in this world, but it is wrong to trust in riches, to be selfish and to fail to use them for good purposes.

September 22<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 46 vv 1-27

Jacob now knew that Joseph was alive, was Pharaoh's viceroy and had made a home for his family in Egypt to provide for them during the remaining years of famine. He had the testimony of Joseph's brothers. There were also all the good things which Pharaoh and Joseph had sent to him. So it must have seemed clear to him what he had to do. But first, he went to the shrine at Beer-sheba and communed with God. He didn't rush headlong straight into what looked to be the right course of action. He waited on God. So should we. Opportunities open up before us. We have decisions to take about our lives. Our families and friends urge us to take a particular course of action. It looks good to us. Doors are opening. But before we commit to action, it is always wise to take it to God in prayer. Am I doing the right thing in going to college to study this or that? Is this the right job for me? Should I marry this person? Would I be wise to invest in this project? Should I move house? Would it be sensible to go into a home or to ask for more help at home? Yes, take advice from people. Look rationally at the pros and cons. Seek to discern any signs. But don't forget to pray to God for wisdom to come to the right decision.

September 23<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 46 vv 28-34

What a reunion that must have been! Jacob had believed his son Joseph to be dead. Then he learned that, not only was Joseph alive, but also that he was now an important and wealthy man. And finally they met after all these years.

We've got used to good communications. Family members may have emigrated, but we can keep in touch. First, there was the mail service, then cables, then telephones and now the internet. Communications which were once very expensive are now cheap or even free. Then there is international air travel making it possible to make journeys that once would have taken weeks or even months in a matter of hours. It was COVID that made me realize just how many people have families overseas and how they miss them when travel is difficult or impossible. There is a tension between being ready to seize opportunities and to move away from home for work or for other reasons and our need to keep close to the people we love.

September 24<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 16)

Genesis 47 vv 1-12

**O LORD**, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

We can't continue in safety without God's succour: not the Church, not the nation, not our own families, not the world itself. Everything depends on God. We all depend on God. Our lives therefore ought to be filled with thankfulness and praise and sustained by prayer. God had provided very generously for Jacob and his family. They were allowed to live in the best part of the land, to graze their flocks & herds and to be supported by the largesse of the son who was the Viceroy. Jacob met Pharaoh and blessed him – an honour indeed.

Through all the changing  
scenes of life,  
In trouble and in joy,  
The praises of my God shall  
still  
My heart and tongue employ.

Oh, magnify the Lord with me,  
With me exalt His name;  
When in distress to Him I  
called,  
He to my rescue came.

The hosts of God encamp  
around  
The dwellings of the just;

Deliverance He affords to all  
Who on His succour trust.

Oh, make but trial of His love,  
Experience will decide  
How blest they are, and only  
they,  
Who in His truth confide.

Fear Him, ye saints, and you  
will then  
Have nothing else to fear;  
Make you His service your  
delight,  
Your wants shall be His care.

September 25<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 47 vv 13-26

Who owns the land? Presumably, when there weren't many people in the world, families & tribes just settled where they wanted to live and made it their home. Very likely, sometimes more powerful people took it away from them. Or they moved on because of drought or because they had exhausted the soil. The Israelites took the land of Canaan from the people who already lived there by conquest. God had judged that the wickedness of the Canaanites justified their being deprived of their land. The Land of Israel then belonged to God. It was divided up

among the tribes and families by lot. If you had to sell your ancestral land, you got it back in the Year of the Jubilee – the 50<sup>th</sup> year. Most of England is registered as owned by someone, purchased or inherited. If you inherited your land, how did your ancestors acquire it? Did they buy it? Did they seize it from their neighbours? Were they awarded it by a king? We may own land, but it can be compulsorily purchased by the council or the government. What gives them the right to take our land. We see here how the Egyptians' land came into the ownership of Pharaoh. He was entitled to 20% crop. (That's much less than the basic rate of income tax! But Pharaoh wasn't expected to provide, schools, hospitals, etc..) Joseph did give the Egyptians seed to sow. It's interesting to consider questions like where power comes from, and wealth, and land, and what are the responsibilities of those who have them? Ultimately, all power and wealth come from God and we are responsible to Him for what we do with them.

September 26<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 47 vv 27-31

I was eight when we moved from Betsham in the parish of Southfleet to Wigmore. Southfleet Church is an ancient building, surrounded by a churchyard to which I was sometimes taken to visit a grave. Shortly after we arrived at Wigmore, a new Church was built. At the time, I was surprised that the Vicar of Wigmore was emphatic that there would be no graveyard. I think I understand a bit better now why he might have thought like that. Graveyards are hard work to maintain in a tidy condition and people feel very strongly about them. People understandably get upset when things go wrong. There might be vandalism or theft of flowers or memorials. In the early Summer, when the grass grows quickly, churchyards may become impenetrable jungles. The chancellor's churchyard regulations sometimes won't allow families the headstones or inscriptions they think appropriate. People may feel very strongly that they want to be buried in a particular place, as Jacob did. The rector or vicar may find himself caught between the irreconcilable demands of bereaved people and diocesan bureaucracy and his primary desire to be a pastor to all the people of the parish.

We do our best, but shouldn't we be emphasising God's gift of eternal life to us, rather than the final resting place of our mortal remains?

September 27<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 48 vv 1-22

Jacob had lived a long life. He had faced many challenges and come through hardship and adventure. He had not always been a good man, but he had lived by faith in God and God had richly blessed him. He rejoices that he has lived to see Joseph's children, the sons of his favourite son, the one whom he had believed to be dead. Jacob affirms that Joseph's sons will be as his son. There are twelve tribes of Israel, descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, but the tribe of Levi will be separated from the others as priests and ministers to the LORD, effectively subtracting one from the twelve. Counting Ephraim and Manasseh – Joseph's sons – as two tribes will restore the number to twelve. It is interesting that Jacob puts the younger Ephraim before Manasseh, just as he himself received the better blessing from Isaac than his older brother Esau.

September 28<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 49 vv 1-29 or vv 8-12

This chapter comes in the daily readings in Common Worship before Christmas. It's not easy to read out loud. Jacob's words to his sons are prophecies regarding how the tribes which they beget will settle the land of Canaan and what each will do, how each will live. The reason that this reading is appointed in the lead up to Christmas is that vv 8-12, especially v10, are taken to be a prophecy of the coming of Jesus, Who was, of course of the tribe of Judah. Like David, Jesus would be a King and He would wield the sceptre – symbol of kingly power. Jesus is, of course, not only King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is also the great High Priest. The high priests from Moses' time were of the tribe of Levi. Moses was 430 years after the death of Jacob. In the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews points out that Jesus was not of the tribe of Levi. Therefore His order of priesthood is of a different magnitude from that of the priests in Jerusalem. They, like all of us, are sinners who have to offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as those of the people. Their sacrifices are not effective and have to be performed time after time. But Jesus is a different kind of priest. He is the sinless One Who offers Himself to be *a full, perfect, and sufficient*

*sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* His sacrifice is eternally effective and washes away all our sin if we come to Him. in faith.

September 29<sup>th</sup> (St Michael & All Angels)      Genesis 49 v38 – 50 v13

Jacob very much wanted to be buried back in the Land of Canaan and in the family plot. This was the only land which Abraham ever owned in Canaan. His ownership of that plot staked a claim to the Promised Land for his seed which would follow him. Some people still want to be buried in their family graves or to return to the place from which they came to be buried there. Similarly, some people like to be buried or to have their ashes scattered or buried in places which have been special for them. Some want to do something really spectacular like have their ashes sent up in a rocket or firework. Some people's ashes are even made into jewellery for their heirs to wear and to feel close to them. Jacob certainly had a big send off! Many of us were very moved by the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II, which seemed very fitting, appropriate for someone who had been blessed with a long life which she had dedicated in the service of our nation and the wider world.

Nevertheless, I come back to what Jesus says about those who die in the Lord. *They are equal unto the angels; and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.* That surely matters so much more than what we do with our mortal remains.

I've found that this prayer from the Funeral Service has grown on me over the years.

**ALMIGHTY** God, with whom do live the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity: We give thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our *brother* out of the miseries of this sinful world; beseeching thee, that it may please thee, of thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to hasten thy kingdom; that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



In many ways, it is what I am here for as Rector of Cuxton and Halling – to facilitate the passage of all my parishioners (in God’s good time of course) to their *perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory*. That matters so much more than keeping their graves tidy! PTO for today’s collect.

**O EVERLASTING** God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; Mercifully grant, that as thy holy Angels always do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

September 30<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 50 vv 15-26

The brothers don’t quite believe that Joseph has forgiven them and resort to a lie. If forgiveness is genuine, it is without reservation. Joseph’s forgiveness obviously was sincere and the other brothers should have been ashamed of themselves to resort to deceit. Joseph tells them again that everything that has happened has been part of God’s plan. The Israelites will not only survive but flourish and eventually settle again in the Promised Land - despite slavery, faithlessness, disobedience to God, the trials and temptations of the forty years in the wilderness and many other failures. God is faithful. It is all of Him. God’s redemption of Israel is a “type” of His redemption of the whole world. It is all of God. God loves us as we are. It does not depend on our righteousness or our wisdom. We sin. We fail. We are faithless. But God never gives up on us. *The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*

Psalms 105: 7. He is the Lord our God : his judgements are in all the world. 8. He hath been alway mindful of his covenant and promise : that he made to a thousand generations; 9. Even the covenant that he made with Abraham : and the oath that he sware unto Isaac; 10. And appointed the same unto Jacob for a law : and to Israel for an everlasting testament; 11. Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan : the lot of your inheritance; 12. When there were yet but a few of them : and they strangers in the land; 13. What time as they went from one nation to

another : from one kingdom to another people; 14. He suffered no man to do them wrong : but reprov'd even kings for their sakes; 15. Touch not mine Anointed : and do my prophets no harm. 16. Moreover, he called for a dearth upon the land : and destroyed all the provision of bread. 17. But he had sent a man before them : even Joseph, who was sold to be a bond-servant; 18. Whose feet they hurt in the stocks : the iron entered into his soul; 19. Until the time came that his cause was known : the word of the Lord tried him.

20. The king sent, and delivered him : the prince of the people let him go free. 21. He made him lord also of his house : and ruler of all his substance; 22. That he might inform his princes after his will : and teach his senators wisdom. 23. Israel also came into Egypt : and Jacob was a stranger in the land of Ham. 24. And he increased his people exceedingly : and made them stronger than their enemies;