

Reflection 1, on Gen. 37:1-4, 12-28

The Story of Joseph

So we have gone forward five chapters in Genesis from last week, when Jacob wrestled with the angel. And today we have an equally exciting story. Jacob had been renamed Israel by God and had twelve sons by four women, his wives, [Leah](#) and [Rachel](#), and his concubines, [Bilhah](#) and [Zilpah](#), all of whom became the heads of their own family groups, later known as the [Twelve Tribes of Israel](#), and it is also known that he had a daughter, [Dinah](#) - and [probably others who are not mentioned](#).

Joseph was the second youngest and in this story he is a 17-year-old out looking after the sheep with his brothers. But he comes home and tells stories behind their backs. He is Jacob's favourite son, because he was born to him in his old age, and he has shown this by making him 'a richly ornamented robe'. Elsewhere this is described as 'a coat of many colours' and in more recent years 'a technicolour dreamcoat'. Why a dreamcoat? Because Joseph was known as a dreamer. He had prophetic dreams, in which he foretold that his brothers - and his parents - would bow down to him. Well you can imagine what jealousy that evoked - especially as he had already received a mark of Jacob's favouritism with a special robe - 'the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore'.

So the brothers, when they see Joseph coming to look for them, refer to him scornfully as "this master of dreams" (37:19), and they conspire to kill him. Reuben, the oldest brother, persuades them otherwise. So they instead strip Joseph of his beautiful robe and throw him into an empty well or cistern.

There is no record of how long he spent there before he was sold off to a passing caravan of Ishmaelites, bound for Egypt. It must have been a scary place to be.

I have felt physical fear twice in my life - once when being pursued by an angry orangutan in Borneo (that's another story) and the other time in Jerusalem.

Underneath St. Peter in Gallicantu, in Jerusalem, the church built over the probable site of the palace of Caiaphas, are the remains of a fifth-century shrine with Christian markings on the walls, including seven Byzantine crosses. On a still lower level there is a network of first-century caves, one of which is known as the Sacred Pit. Here, the early Christians believed, Jesus was confined on the night before He died.

The Sacred Pit is about five metres square, seven metres deep. No door, no window, no light. The only entrance is through a narrow, bottleneck opening at the top, through which a prisoner was lowered by a harness of ropes secured around shoulders and chest. I have been in that Pit. It is not a pleasant experience. The fear is palpable - it makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.

How many people are trapped like that at the moment, in Beirut under rubble, in prisons, in makeshift camps? Can we really say to them 'Do not be afraid?' No, I don't believe we can. We can only say that Jesus has been there and is there now - he knows the darkest, deepest places of our fears and promises to be with us, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

In June this year a book called [Cuarentena](#) ("Quarantine") was published, a diary by journalist Alver Metalli on how people lived the coronavirus confinement in one of the shantytowns on the outskirts of Buenos Aires.

Pope Francis has written the prologue and says:

'It will do us good to read this diary that tells the day by day "quarantine" lived in a slum where a group of priests whom I love very much work; they are inspired by a genuine faith in Jesus Christ and by a great love for these poor people who live in shacks and hovels on the margins of society.

The book makes us see – through the gift of testimony – that there is no place, however dark it may be, where a ray of the good God cannot reach to warm some hearts and give light to lives that would otherwise remain invisible.

The story of Joseph - or Jesus - does not end here, in the cistern or the Pit - there is much more to come! Watch this space!

Peta Tracey

9 Aug. 2020

Reflection 2, on Matt 14:22-33

"Do not be afraid" is a key message in our Gospel and hymn just now.

It's a message which appears over 100 times in the Bible. Today we hear Jesus say to his friends in the boat "Take courage ! It is I. Don't be afraid".

The context of the reading is that Jesus had just heard of his cousin John's beheading thanks to Salomé. He was then surrounded by crowds asking for healing and teaching. The day was hot and intense, it was getting late and so he felt it only right to feed the five thousand as we heard last week.

Everyone was tired, so Jesus asked his disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of him across the lake, he dismissed the well-fed up 5'000 crowd and went by himself up the mountain to pray. He must have been exhausted and he needed time on his own for solitary prayer.

Later that night the storm comes up.

Interestingly, the text doesn't say the disciples in the boat were afraid because of the storm. They had every reason to be afraid. The sea of Galilee is notoriously volatile – a bit like our own Lac Léman. Also, they were 1) already a considerable distance from land, 2) buffeted by waves and 3) the wind was against them. The boats – even today – on Galilee are pretty small and vulnerable, but these were seasoned sailors.

But possibly quite later – shortly before dawn - Jesus breaks off from his solitary prayer on the mountain and goes to see how his friends are doing. They weren't shouting to him for help, but notice *he* went to *them*. Maybe anticipating their need ?? Maybe 'going to meet them at their point of need' – a phrase often used these days ??

Now, you know me – I can't help thinking that Jesus must have been really exhausted when he sent his disciples on ahead before going up the mountain. They were taking away the boat ! How was he supposed to catch them up ?

Anyway – being pragmatic – Jesus walks over. No easy feat as we know they had gone a long way and he doesn't calm the storm.

When the disciples see him, they can't believe their eyes and think he's a ghost. And *that's* when they became - not only afraid, but terrified.

So Jesus calms *them* – not the storm. 'Take heart – it's me. Do not be afraid'. And good old Peter decides he'd like to have a go at water walking. Impetuous ? Yes, the storm was still raging. But Peter remains true to his character. He doesn't overthink things.

Jesus says 'come' and so he does. However, the wild wind reminds Peter of the reality of what he's doing, he becomes afraid and starts to sink.

But Jesus also remains true to character. The first thing he does isn't to chide or laugh at Peter, he just reaches out his hand and catches Peter. Peter panicked and shouted out 'Lord, save me!' and Jesus does just that.

Ok, afterwards Jesus ribs his mate and says "Ye of little faith. Why did you doubt ?". But Jesus was probably a bit disappointed for Peter. He was doing so well and then - he lost it. Maybe Jesus was also very pleased that Peter had at least tried. Jesus simply said "come" and Peter went for it. No-one else in the boat tried. I wonder what I would have done ?

Do not be afraid.

But being afraid is part of life. God knows that fear comes to us as easily as breathing. Jesus knew what fear is - - if he never was afraid – practicing what he preached - he came *awfully* close to it in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he died.

He knows each one of us has fears. Covid, old age, exam results, employment, rejection, failure. His invitation is to face up to our fears. Don't be afraid to be afraid !

As we heard last week from Chris, God invites us to get close to him, to put our trust in him and 'step out of the boat', as it were, and take on our fears.

So what's the message for us today ?

Maybe it's don't be afraid to be afraid ?

Franklin D Roosevelt made famous the 16th century concept "we have nothing to fear but fear itself".

When we first feel afraid, maybe our first reaction could be to ask – do I really need to be afraid? I've been here before – or others have been here before – so maybe with your help Lord, it will all work out ?

He is with us and – as with Peter – he reaches out his hand to catch and support us. That way we can go *through* our fear to be with him and receive his peace. That peace which passes all understanding. When we are afraid we can open ourselves to facing it together with God's help and go through fear to peace.

John Pritchard speaks of the moments of anticipation and hesitation before walking under a waterfall. We hold back knowing of the freezing impact of the cold water buffeting down that's going to hit us. Yet once we get through that cold curtain of current which takes our breath away, we enjoy the area behind the waterfall which feels warm, safe, exhilarating, full of peace *inside* and *beside* the maelstrom.

Jesus wants us to ask him to help us get through our sources of fear together with him and receive his peace in his company and safety.

And that's also a key role which our La Côte community wishes to offer. When we are facing challenges and concerns and feel afraid, don't feel we have to do it on our own. Turn for help from God through prayer and the friendship of members of La Côte inspired by God's love and the Holy Spirit. Don't be afraid to ask !

To finish as we did last week – another prayer from St. Teresa of Avila, which we might recognise as a Taizé chant:

Let nothing disturb you,
let nothing make you afraid,
all things will pass away,
God alone never changes.
Patience obtains all things,
Whoever has God will want for nothing.
God alone suffices.

Amen

John Tracey

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