

Lectionary Readings: Exodus 2:23 – 3:10
Psalm 100
Hebrews 13: 1-15
Luke 12: 49-56

Joseph, as a young man, was a ‘dreamer’ who antagonised his brothers by recounting ‘visions’ he had in which they were bowing down to him. They despised him so much that when the opportunity came to do away with him in the desert, they threw him into a pit with the intention of killing him directly or leaving him there to die – they would tell their father he had been killed by wild animals and present his blood stained ‘coat of many colours’.

As we read the Book of Genesis we realise that God’s hand was on Joseph and ‘fortuitously’ a group of travelling merchants arrived before the brothers could carry out Plan A – instead they sold their brother into slavery. We remember his experiences in Egypt – how he came to be in prison and his interpretation of the dream of Pharaoh’s servant. The man, reinstated, forgot all about his promise to Joseph – until Pharaoh himself had a dream which nobody could interpret; the seven fat and seven starving cows; the seven years of plenty followed by the seven of famine.

Joseph was put in charge of the organisation of the country during the years of plenty and oversaw the distribution of grain during the years of famine. He became second only to Pharaoh.

Joseph – A FOREIGNER – saved Egypt!! He was held in high regard by Pharaoh and the whole of his family were brought down to Egypt, allowed to settle, and even given a very fertile region for their dwelling.

At the beginning of Exodus we read:

The Israelites oppressed

¹ These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family:

² Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; ³ Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; ⁴ Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher.

⁵ The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy^a in all; Joseph was already in Egypt.

⁶ Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, ⁷ but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.

⁸ Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.

⁹ ‘Look,’ he said to his people, ‘the Israelites have become far too numerous for us.

¹⁰ Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.’

¹¹ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh.

¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³ and worked them ruthlessly.

¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with harsh labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labour, the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

Footnotes

- a. [Exodus 1:5](#) Masoretic Text (see also Gen. 46:27); Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint (see also Acts 7:14 and note at Gen. 46:27) *seventy-five*

The new king, in verse 8 above, we are told was probably Ahmose, the founder of the 18th dynasty. If we continued reading in Exodus 1 we find the account of Pharaoh instructing the Hebrew midwives to kill all new born males – which they didn’t do – claiming that the Hebrew women were vigorous and gave birth before the midwife arrived! Pharaoh then instructed his people to throw every Hebrew boy that was born into the Nile.

We then come to the account of the birth of Moses and hiding his waterproofed papyrus basket in the reeds on the banks of the Nile; his discovery by Pharaoh’s daughter – who did realise he was a Hebrew baby! – And his subsequent upbringing in the palace.

Chapter 2 records:

Moses flees to Midian

¹¹ One day, after Moses had grown up, (*it is suggested that he was probably 40 years old at this time*) he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.

¹² Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

¹³ The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, ‘Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?’

¹⁴ The man said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?’ Then Moses was afraid and thought, ‘What I did must have become known.’

¹⁵ When Pharaoh (*Thutmose III probably ruled Egypt at this time*) heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.

Sitting down by the well, Moses encountered the seven daughters of Reuel/Jethro, a priest of Midian, and the flock they had come to water. When other shepherds arrived and drove the 'girls' away from the well and its troughs, Moses came to their rescue and watered their flock. In chapter 2 we read how Moses marries Zipporah, one of Jethro's daughters, and in the reading today we find him tending his father-in law's flock out in the wilderness.

The reading begins with the death of Pharaoh (*probably Tutmose again as he had a long reign*) and the Israelites calling out – groaning in their slavery. It goes on with the well-known account of the call of Moses.

Last week I looked over the edge of a cliff on the Isle of Purbeck – below me on a lower part of the cliff was a blackened tree; the only vegetation associated with it was regeneration at ground level. It looked as though it had been burnt, but how(?), as nothing else showed any fire damage and the location was very inaccessible – a mystery!

I am sure that all of us, like Moses, would turn aside to see that other mystery – a bush being burnt but not consumed: (Exodus 3)

⁴When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!'

And Moses said, 'Here I am.'

⁵'Do not come any closer,' God said.

'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.'

⁶Then he said, 'I am the God of your father,^[a] the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.'

At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷The LORD said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

⁸So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

⁹And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.

¹⁰**So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.'**

Footnotes

- a. [Exodus 3:6](#) Masoretic Text; Samaritan Pentateuch (see Acts 7:32) *fathers*

The Lord, telling Moses, that He is going to rescue the people of Israel echoes Exodus 2:24-25:

²⁴God heard their groaning and **he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.**

²⁵So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

Our reading comes to a conclusion with the Lord telling Moses he is to go to Pharaoh and bring the people of Israel out of Egypt. If we were to read on we would note all the excuses that Moses gave for not being the one to go. We reach well into chapter 4 before Moses claims to be ineloquent and at this point the Lord is angry with him – Result, “one to go” becomes “two to go” as his brother Aaron will become the ‘mouthpiece’ for the Lord; Moses will have his staff to perform ‘signs and wonders’.

Psalm 100, the appointed reading for this week, is one of the shortest – at five verses - in the Psalter.

The NIV (UK) translation gives as a heading “**A psalm. For giving grateful praise**” whereas the text of the NIV Study Bible has “**A psalm. For giving thanks**”.

The NIV Bible Commentary gives as a description of the psalm – “**The Lord is God and He is good**”.

By way of introduction it goes on to say:

In hymnic form the worshippers sing about the Lord and His covenant relationship with His people.

It divides the five verses into four sections as indicated by the paragraphs below:

¹Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

²Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

³Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his;^[a] we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

⁵For the LORD is good and his love endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Footnotes

- a. [Psalm 100:3](#) Or *and not we ourselves*

- a. Call to Give Thanks (verses 1-2)
- b. Celebration of the Covenant (verse 3)
- c. Call to Give Thanks (verse 4)
- d. Celebration of the Covenant (verse 5)

“The Message” expresses the meaning of the Hebrew in a different way – being a paraphrase rather than a literal translation:

¹⁻² On your feet now—applaud GOD! Bring a gift of laughter, sing yourselves into his presence.

³ Know this: GOD is God, and God, GOD. He made us; we didn’t make him. We’re his people, his well-tended sheep.

⁴ Enter with the password: “Thank you!” Make yourselves at home, talking praise. Thank him. Worship him.

⁵ For GOD is sheer beauty, all-generous in love, loyal always and ever.

The passage from Hebrews 13 is headed “**Concluding exhortations**”.

The writer urges his readers to a number of practical actions:

Show hospitality to strangers – you never know who they might be!

Remember those in prison;

Maintain the sanctity of marriage – a ‘hot-potato’ given this year’s Conference decision, and an area where I am sure there will be divided opinion;

Live materially responsible lives;

This is the basis of the Christian Social Gospel. Personal salvation and reconciliation to the Father are the prime reasons for coming to Jesus and for declaring, preaching, our faith; but acceptance of Him into our lives places obligations on us as we live our lives “in, but not of, the world”.

The writer of Hebrews continues:

Remember your leaders – try to live lives that reflect their faith;

Do not be swayed by ‘trendy’ but strange teaching.

We note in verse 11 another clear indication of the writer aiming his message at a Jewish Christian readership with reference to the Old Testament way of making an offering for sin:

¹¹ The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp.

He then makes a comparison with Jesus, crucified outside the city:

¹² And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

¹³ Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

¹⁴ For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

Verse 13, in the light of the background to the letter, refers to followers turning from Judaism to Christianity – leaving all the old trappings behind them.

Perhaps there is a message for us in this verse – our going to Jesus; discerning and following His plan for our lives; could lead to approbation or it could lead to disgrace. We should be prepared for either.

We are reminded in verse 14 that our promised future is not here in the present; the present is transient; the future we look to is yet to come.

I have commented before on the unusual combination of Biblical Texts used by Johannes Brahms in his (German) Requiem. Here we have another example.

Part V – for Soprano Solo and Chorus, is based on the following texts:

Ye now have sorrow: but I will again behold you, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy shall no man take from you. *John 16:22*

Thee will I comfort, as one whom his mother comforts. *Isaiah 66: 13*

Now behold me, ye see how for a little while labour and toil were my lot, yet have I found much rest. *Ecclesiasticus 51: 27*

Part VI – for Baritone Solo and Chorus follows:

For we have here no abiding city, but we seek that to come. *Hebrews 13: 14*

Behold, I shew you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet: for behold, the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. *1 Corinthians 15: 51-52*

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory, O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? *1 Corinthians 15: 54-55*

Worthy art Thou, Lord, of praise and glory, honour and power: For Thou, Almighty, hast created all things, and because of Thy will they were, and were created. *Revelation 14: 11*

The Oratorio then ends with part VII for Chorus alone.

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: even so, saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours; and their works follow after them. *Revelation 14: 13*

Whenever I Read Hebrews 13 and come to verse 14, I have the music of Johannes Brahms going through my head! Part V tells of suffering and strife; Part VI, the hope which we all have for the future and this hope is reinforced by the New Testament verses that follow.

Our reading ends with an instruction:

¹⁵ Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

“Lips that openly profess his name” – I am sure we can all think of many hymns and songs that do just that.

At the name of Jesus
Every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him
King of Glory now..... (STF 317)

Caroline Maria Noel

Jesus is the name we honour;
Jesus is the name we praise.
Majestic name above all other names,
The highest heav'n and earth proclaim
That Jesus is our God..... (STF 354)

Philip Lawson-Johnston

There is power in the name of Jesus;
We believe in His name.
We have called on the name of Jesus;
We are saved! We are saved!
At His name the demons flee.
At His name captives are freed.
For there is no other name that is higher
Than Jesus!..... (Songs of Fellowship 545)

Noel Richards

The Gospel passage from Luke is challenging. It starts with Jesus telling the crowd that he has come to bring fire on earth. The note on this verse in the NIV Study Bible says:

Fire is applied figuratively in different ways in the NT. Here it is associated with judgement (v.49) and division (v.51). Judgement falls on the wicked, who are separated from the righteous.

In verse 50 Jesus speaks of a personal baptism to come and the ‘constraint’ He is under until it is completed! The baptism he refers to is of course His crucifixion – His suffering on the cross. The completion He anticipates is expressed in John’s Gospel (chapter 19):

²⁸, **knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled,**
Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’

²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.

³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, **‘It is finished.’** With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Returning to the theme of division, a parallel passage is found in only one other Gospel – in Matthew, chapter 10:

³⁴ ‘Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to turn

“a man against his father, a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law –

³⁶ a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.”

Jesus is referring back to an OT Scripture at this point – found in Micah 7.

The message of Christianity, a message of love and peace, is divisive! I am sure we have all experienced this – we find that the majority of our friends and acquaintances are just apathetic towards those things which are central to our lives but from time to time we encounter outright hostility. I have referred to friends and acquaintances but Jesus focuses on division, even within families.

The final part of our reading is headed **“Interpreting the times”**.

Have you noticed a change in the information being given these days in BBC weather forecasts? There seems to be much more information about the position of the ‘Jet Stream’ and the effect it has on our weather conditions depending on its position relative to us - to the south or the north. I often wonder if this reflects the transfer of responsibility for the forecasts from the Met. Office to the commercial company - Meteo.

It would appear that weather forecasting in Palestine was much simpler! The NIV Study Bible comments on verses 54-56:

Wind from the west was from the Mediterranean Sea; from the south it was from the desert. Although people could use such indicators to forecast the weather,

they could not recognise the signs of spiritual crisis, the coming of the Messiah, the threat of His death, the coming confrontation with Rome, and the eternal consequences these events would have for their own lives.

We may have more difficulty, especially in the UK, of forecasting the weather but are we any better than the people Jesus was addressing in interpreting the present time.

As I write this, parts of the USA and Greece are suffering an unprecedented heat-wave and subsequent forest fires. Many people have lost their homes and everything they possessed. In Central Europe and China devastating floods have been experienced.

About two and a half hours ago (at 8am on Monday August 9th) a United Nations Scientific report was issued, ahead of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) to be held in Glasgow this November. Probably the most extensive report ever, it states that Climate Change from Global Warming can **now** only be mitigated not prevented.

Are the leaders of the world prepared to make the necessary sacrifices? Are voices being raised and heard in their countries?

These may not be ‘spiritual’ matters; they are similar to the ‘coming confrontation with Rome’ at the time of Jesus, but they are of urgent concern for the entire human race. Let us pray for the leaders of our churches and all their members: for the political leaders of the UK countries; for the populations of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, that all may be given wisdom and encouragement in addressing this matter.

God in his love for us lent us this planet,
gave it a purpose in time and in space:
small as a spark from the fire of creation,
cradle of life and the home of our race.

Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,
life that sustains us in body and mind:
plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,
riches undreamed-of to fathom and find.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
long have we wasted what others have needed,
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
ours, as God's stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
good Lord, deliver us, world without end!

Fred Pratt Green

(STF 727)

The original version of this hymn won a place in *Sixteen Hymns on the Stewardship of the Environment* which was sponsored in the early seventies by the Hymn Society of America.

The original contained the line:

Long have the wars of man ruined his harvest;

This was later changed to the gender neutral line in verse 3 above.

The original hymn also contained an additional verse:

Casual despoilers, or high-priests of Mammon,
selling the future for present rewards,
careless of life and contemptuous of beauty:
bid them remember: the Earth is the Lord's.

A book, I have, on “The Hymns and Ballads of Fred Pratt Green” also notes two other principal changes to the original. Line 3 of verse 3 read:

Now we pollute it, in cynical silence . . .

And Line 3 of the last verse:

Now from pollution, disease and damnation . . .