



A sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity

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26 July 2020

- [Genesis 29:15-28](#)
- [Psalm 105:1-11](#)
- [Romans 8:26-39](#)
- [Matthew 13:31-33 & 44-52](#)

If a good soap opera is your thing, then the Old Testament reading from Genesis provides you with just the right story line. Jacob the main character had deceived his father, Isaac by the help of his mother and took the inheritance (the birthright) and the blessing that should have gone to his elder brother, Esau. This created a rather big rift in the family, and we are told that his brother Esau held a grudge against him. Feelings become explosive within the family when Esau threatens revenge; He is not planning to do it straight away, at least not while his father is still alive. With this pending threat, his mother advises him to leave home and suggest he goes and stay with her brother, Laban in Haran some distance away. So Jacob takes her advice and runs away from home. If a good soap opera is your thing, then the Old Testament reading from Genesis provides you with just the right story line. Jacob the main character had deceived his father, Isaac by the help of his mother and took the inheritance (the birthright) and the blessing that should have gone to his elder brother, Esau. This created a rather big rift in the family, and we are told that his brother Esau held a grudge against him. Feelings become explosive within the family when Esau threatens revenge; He is not planning to do it straight away, at least not while his father is still alive. With this pending threat, his mother advises him to leave home and suggest he goes and stay with her brother, Laban in Haran some distance away. So Jacob takes her advice and runs away from home.

This is a story of conflict and deep deception – it cannot be more hurtful – than to be cheated by your own brother and on top of that, to know that your own mother was the architect of that situation. If not within our own family, we all





know of families where things are not going right. Families where there's some level of conflict about something; it might be minor or major. For some lockdown would have been a relief that they did not have to pretend at playing happy family for others it would have exacerbated an already fragile situation and brought things to a head. Conflict within families is not a new thing – it would appear that ever since the garden of Eden the seed of deception and disharmony was sown.

But the deception around Jacob did not stop there, he goes to live with his uncle Laban and falls in love with Laban's younger daughter, Rachael. He has no money to pay the usual dowry and so resorted to say 'he would do anything, pay any price for Rachel'. Jacob agreed to work for his uncle for 7 years! At the end of the 7 years he is tricked by Laban who felt that he could not possibly give his youngest daughter into marriage before marrying the oldest, Leah. He is tricked into marrying Leah. You've heard the phrase 'What goes round comes round.' The deceiver himself has been deceived! But so intense was his love for Rachel – he was determined to marry her so he agrees to work for another 7 years!

I cannot help but wonder what if anything Jacob learnt from these experiences. At this point of the story we do not hear him calling on God. It is a few more chapters on before we find God speaking into the situation; and from this encounter, he had a real, life changing experience, one that was to lead to his brother's life changing too. Reconciliation with his brother Esau, became real. It became front and centre: his changed life, leading to his brother's life being changed too. Changed lives, changing lives.

This is the Jacob with a shady past who later becomes a significant player in the story of the Children of Israel. He is known as one of the Patriarch part of the line that becomes Jesus' ancestral heritage. His significance as one of the Patriarch is not based on his character necessarily but on God's character. There was nothing perfect about him, if he lived today, he probably would not have been chosen for a leadership role within the church. Because we fail to see through the lens of Christ. Through our human eyes, we fail to see God's redemptive work, God's generosity in action.





The devil must have thought, great, 'I have thwarted God's plan.' But we cannot thwart God's plan. During the height of the pandemic, I saw a cartoon where the devil is full of glee, "I have locked down all your Churches." "Yes", says God, "But I have reopened them in every home." God's plan will always succeed. Jacob later has an encounter with God in a dream. It does not come easy however and he wrestles with God.

Through this dream he recognises his dependence on God, and learns that God never abandoned him, even in his darkest moments. Jacob was experiencing what Paul was referring to in our reading from Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Paul went on to say, 'Who shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Will it be trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or the sword? In all these things, we are more than conquerors, through the one who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

I wonder if you can think of moments when you recognise God at work in your life. This does not have to be some big razzmatazz moment. It may have seemed like an insignificant, a small moment. Jesus had something to say about small moments, minute things.

In our gospel reading Jesus tells the parable of the mustard seed and the yeast. Something small that can be easily dismissed somehow has unimaginable significance and power. I have learnt that it is the cypress seed that is actually the smallest seed, but culturally, it is the mustard seed that is referred to as the smallest, [remember Jesus using the phrase when he spoke of having faith as small as a mustard seed] Matthew 17:20.

We're being told that the kingdom starts with small beginnings. The story is told of the international gathering discussing how best to spread the faith. Some spoke of more targeted literature; having larger conventions, more tweets, youtubes, facebook one young woman from the African continent piped up, "when we want to take Christianity to one of our villages, we don't do any of





those things. We take a Christian family and send them to live in the village amongst the people. It was the witness of the one family effectively living in their midst that made a major difference.

Change begins with one person (the young girl shot by the Taliban because she advocated that girls should be educated, said in one of her speeches, “1 child, 1 teacher, 1 book, 1 pen, can change the world, education is vital.”) What a huge difference it would be if every single one of us lived out faith amongst the communities of which we are a part.

Jesus continues to give us a glimpse of what the Kingdom is like -small beginnings. Pre-covid 19, many of us looked around at our small congregations with a heavy heart. But I wonder what it would feel like were we to look again and see our small congregations as mustard seeds, yeast, leaven transforming the community around it. It is God’s Spirit in our lives that performs that transformation. On our own, left to our own devices, we would still be caught up in wrangles of selfishness, one seeking to dominate another; one thinking my way or I will withdraw my services; I will not speak to you. In Jamaica, we call this “cass, cass.”

In verses 44 – 52 we read that the Kingdom is like a treasure that has been found. But note that it is found within the context of daily work exercising diligence – probably digging rather deep. Jewish rabbinic law says, ‘finder’s keeper’s’. At the start of lockdown we were beginning to exhibit signs of insecurity – it was as if we left the treasure in our buildings. I am going to be bold and say that we forgot what our purpose was. We mistook the channel for the message and our work of digging deep, being diligent in prayer and reading of scripture, expressing generosity in our caring for one another and with joy, sharing the good news, became lost in our arguing about not being able to go into our buildings!

Every day in the Lord’s prayer, we say, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done....” What might it mean to discover the treasure? Could it be that in effect we discover something of what it means to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, visit the sick and those imprisoned, show compassion to those most vulnerable – this kind





of kingdom means disciplined work borne from a place of prayer and studying of the word of God. ‘And the kingdom is like finding the pearl of great price.’ The pearl was known to be the loveliest of precious stones. There are other pearls, but it is the most precious that it is likened to. It is pertinent that from time to time we do a reality check to ensure that our focus is not just on any pearl – but the pearl of great price Jesus Christ himself – the author & finisher of our faith.

Jacob encountered the real treasure, He encountered the pearl of great price. He became reconciled to his brother, to his family. It is my prayer, that we too, individually and corporately may be able to spend some quality time, reflecting on, seeking those mustard seed moments that might enable us to pray with more confidence: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.”

Not mine, but thine. Amen.

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