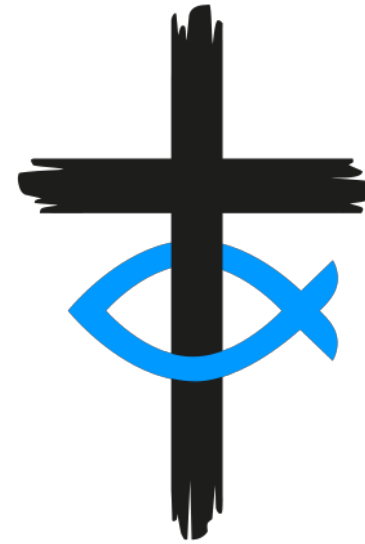


# Daily Devotions from the URC

Joseph part 2

29<sup>th</sup> April 2018 – 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018



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I take heart in today's royal wedding, with an outsider marrying into Establishment. Introducing cultural diversity into the royal household, Meghan herself has had to overcome and to forgive racial abuse.

*God, give us the heart we need to forgive others,  
to grow in grace, understanding and love,  
so that our forgiving of others may echo,  
even faintly, your forgiving of us.*

*We ask in the name of Jesus who,  
even in his deepest pain,  
forgave his tormentors and taught us all  
the depth of love. Amen.*

to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, 'When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here.' And Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

### *Reflection*

We now come to the end of Genesis, with the intrigues and plots of the Joseph Story fresh in our minds. Joseph dies and is buried after a long settled life and distinguished career in a foreign land, and laid to rest there till his remains are taken to his 'homeland'. Through time and fortuitous circumstances, yet feeling intense inner pain, Joseph's willingness to forgive led to reconciliation with his brothers and an eventual reunion with his father.

Joseph's rise to power should not detract from the fact that he got to Egypt by force. It resonates with the contemporary situation of millions of people being displaced fleeing war, poverty, racism, inhumanity, and calamities of nature - although most of these people don't do as well as Joseph. In this story, God is mentioned only at the critical points leaving much unsaid.

Joseph refused to repay his brothers in kind for the way they had treated him. Would he have done so if they were not his brothers or had he not been in a position of authority?

How then do we read this passage in light of revelations of sexual abuse in all our institutions? What about the "Me-too" campaign in outing celebrities who have blighted the lives of many? Do the perpetrators necessarily assume the right to be forgiven? Have we witnessed sufficient personal and institutional contrition?

Should we see ourselves as Joseph, who had power as Second-in-Command in Pharaoh's Court, hence claiming some moral high-ground? Or, might it not be that our real place is that of his brothers - mortals in constant need of forgiveness? The beauty of Hebrew Biblical narrative, with its ethical conundrums, is that it doesn't give you pet answers and constantly challenges the values of our 'civilised society'.

Sunday 29th April

Psalm 45

*Jo Clare-Young, Ordinand at Westminster College and member at Cuxton URC*

1 A noble theme inspires my heart  
with verses for the king;  
My tongue's a skilful writer's pen,  
composing lines to sing.

2 You far excel the best of men;  
your lips are full of grace,  
For God has blessed you evermore;  
his light shines on your face.

3 O mighty one, take up your sword  
and bind it on your thigh;  
With glorious splendour  
clothe yourself  
and with your majesty.

4 Ride forth in state victoriously  
for meekness, truth and right;  
Let your right hand  
display your deeds  
of awesome power and might.

5 Let your sharp arrows  
pierce the hearts  
of those who hate the king;  
And all the nations of the earth  
into subjection bring.

6 Your royal throne, O God, will last  
throughout eternity;  
Your kingdom's sceptre will be one  
of truth and equity.

7 Anointing you with oil of joy,  
your God has made you great,

Because you care for righteousness,  
and wickedness you hate.

8 With aloes, myrrh and cassia  
in fragrant robes you're clad;  
From palaces of ivory  
stringed music makes you glad.

9 Among the women of your court  
king's daughters take their stand;  
The royal bride in finest gold  
appears at your right hand.

10 O daughter, listen and give ear,  
consider what I say;  
You must forget  
your father's house,  
your people far away.

11 Because your beauty is so great,  
the king is held in thrall.  
He is your lord; give him respect,  
before him humbly fall.

12 Inhabitants of Tyre will come  
to offer gifts to you;  
And wealthy people will approach  
your favour to pursue.

13 In glorious  
gold-embroidered robes  
the princess waits within;

14 In richly ornamented clothes  
she's brought before the king.

Attendant maidens follow her  
and so to you are led;  
15 They enter and with great delight  
the palace courts they tread.

16 In places where your fathers stood  
your sons will take their stand;  
You'll make them princes of the realm  
to rule throughout the land.

17 I will perpetuate your fame  
through everlasting days;  
Therefore the nations of the world  
will ever sing your praise.

### *Reflection*

A noble theme inspires the heart of the Psalmist who is not addressing God, or the people of Israel, but a King, a bridegroom... or maybe a hero?

The noble hero rides out in victory, defender of meekness, truth and right. Clothed in glorious splendour he performs deeds of awesome power and might, far excelling the best of us.

This surely is like a movie that is going to have a happy ending; what baddie could stand against a hero God has blessed, upon whose face God shines light. A hero anointed with the oil of gladness. A hero who smells of myrrh, aloes and cassia, an aroma reminiscent of those sanctified in the Temple.

This is the sort of hero who saves the day, wielding his sword of truth and equity and rescuing those in peril. The sort of hero every child wants to become. The sort of hero perhaps we who strive to *walk the way* should still wish to become. We, after all, are called by Christ to be people of meekness, truth and right.

following the death of loved ones were not based on fantasy; the stories of the patriarchs are testimony to household strife. Even the closest families can struggle.

The greatest legacy, of course, is how we live and share love now. How we walk the way of Jesus today, can make it easier for those we leave behind tomorrow.

### *Prayer*

God who holds us fast in life and death,  
help me to cherish your gift of life  
and live it to the full.  
And when I die,  
by the mystery of your grace,  
may my life have been a blessing to others. Amen

Saturday 19th May Genesis 50: 15-26 Forgiveness, death

*Andy Lie is the Ecumenical Officer for Northern Synod.*

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?' So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived for one hundred and ten years. Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were also born on Joseph's knees.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die; but God will surely come

Friday 18th May      Genesis 47: 27-31      Jacob's death near  
*The Rev'd Ros Lyle is a retired minister and a member of Muswell Hill URC*

Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly. Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred forty-seven years. When the time of Israel's death drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favour with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt. When I lie down with my ancestors, carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself on the head of his bed.

### *Reflection*

Death talk in my family was usually the my grandmother's preserve. She was good at it and took a bit of an unseemly interest in the machinations and manoeuvrings that might accompany someone's demise. Very often at the heart of it all would be a discussion around who held the 'title deeds to the lair' - a Scottish phrase meaning who owned the plot in the cemetery. This individual was able to determine who went in and who was left out.

Abraham had the title deeds for the lair in the field of Machpelah. He bought it to bury Sarah, thus laying claim to it for him and his descendants. He was buried there and Isaac, Rebekah and Leah and it is to this burial place, far from Egypt, that Jacob wants to be carried. His wish is about getting back to the land that he believed God had promised to him and his descendants and he makes Joseph pledge to deal truly with him and carry out his bidding. A touch ironic for the man who cheated his own father, Isaac, and received the blessing meant for his brother Esau.

It is important to take time to think about what we want to leave behind when we die; to make sure that we don't leave behind a mess for other people to clear up; that family and friends aren't left carrying the dead bones of our wishes for the rest of their lives. More, that our final wishes are not too demanding or divisive but life enhancing for those who come after. My grandmother's observations about the family intrigues and unpleasantness

Discipleship calls us to a meekness of lifestyle, trusting in, committing to, and quietly waiting for God. Meekness helps a hero to refrain from anger and defensiveness, absorb difficulty and criticism without lashing back.

Discipleship calls us to a lifestyle of radical truth, of showing our weaknesses and struggles. A lifestyle of truth sometimes means the hero must make a stand, not just on big issues but on small day to day ones.

Discipleships call us to a lifestyle that seeks right and justice for all. A hero must fight for a world that offers justice for all people, for fair systems that reflect God's love. Whatever age we are, we can still grow up to be the hero. We can star in the movie, as a defender of meekness, truth and right; a hero who performs small but awesome deeds power and might as we *walk the way*.

### *Prayer*

Lord of action,  
You call us to be people of meekness, truth and right. You call us to live and speak truthfully, humbly, and meekly. You call us to seek justice in all things, in all places and for all people.

Forgive us when we wait for someone else to do something, for a hero to save the day. Encourage us to make a start, to make a commitment. Let your noble theme inspire our hearts. Inspire us to speak out now. Inspire us to act now. Inspire us to seek transformation now.  
Amen

Monday 30th April      Genesis 41: 46-52      Storing up in plenty  
*The Rev'd David Scott is minister of Duke Street and Saughtonhall URCS in Edinburgh*

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. So Joseph stored up grain in such

abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure. Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, ‘For’, he said, ‘God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.’ The second he named Ephraim, ‘For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.’

### *Reflection*

For those familiar with the musical it can be difficult to read the story of Joseph without the soundtrack playing in the background. And so as the story progresses and Joseph’s fortunes change the musical also changes gear with a fast pace narrative and upbeat tune to reflect positivity and efficiency. Positivity in the sense that a series of events has taken Joseph from a favoured position in his large family to a pit, slavery and prison, rising now to be Pharaoh’s “number two”. It also demonstrates the efficiency and skill of Joseph as he plans, organises and prepares to ensure Egypt takes full advantage of the present and gets ready for a period of anticipated famine. So we discover as the events unfold that Joseph can indeed accurately interpret dreams and that he is a very capable character. In the last section of today’s text we also discover Joseph’s commitment to God. Not only has he risen to hold a powerful position in Egypt, but he now also has a wife and two sons. Times are indeed good for Joseph and in the naming of his sons he has not forgotten God in all of the newly found busyness, responsibilities and joys of his life. Perhaps a reminder to us that God is ever present. We can easily make time to turn to God in times of despair, loss and suffering when the soundtrack to our life slows and becomes downbeat. Just as easily, do we also take time to turn to God in the times when all seems well and our soundtracks have a fast pace narrative with an upbeat tune?

### *Prayer*

Ever present God,  
Make me realise that you are always here.  
In my despair and my joy.  
In the quiet times and the busy times.  
In times of sadness and sorrow.  
In times of celebration and smiles.

### *Reflection*

There used to be a company directory called “Who owns whom?” In ancient Egypt, there could have been an entry: “Owner: Pharaoh – Owned: every person.”

What do we think of this story? It meant that everyone had food to eat now and seed to plant to grow food for the future. The people’s prayer ‘Give us, each day, the food that we need’ was answered. But at what cost? And at *whose* cost? As I write, we are hearing the news of the collapse of the huge construction and services company *Carillion*, and I heard a discussion between two young people about the relative merits of Capitalism and Communism. Neither of them argued very well, sadly. Whenever we talk about these great systems, we tend to see only how corrupt human beings wreck them. Which system was operating under Pharaoh and Joseph? I can imagine two residents of Joseph’s Egypt discussing the question: ‘So, the state owns us now, body and soul.’ ‘Yes, but at least we are sure to eat! With Pyramid Construction and Agriculture Inc., we could be starving!’ Were Joseph’s food policies benign dictatorship or tyranny?

These are huge questions. As individual Christians, can we hope to influence governments and multi-national companies? Well, surely, we must answer ‘yes’, otherwise we are just pawns, to be pushed around. God has given each of us a brain and intellect. The *least* we can do is to understand the questions, inform ourselves of what is happening. Who owns *us*? Jesus said “What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” The word translated ‘life’ is ‘psuche’ – which could mean ‘soul’ or ‘essential self’ – much more than just ‘physical life’. Who does the ‘essential you’ belong to?

### *Prayer*

Lord of ALL, may those who have power in the world use it benignly, so as to ensure that every human being flourishes. And may we use our wealth and intellects to ensure those in power are held to account. Amen

*Prayer:*

Exodus God,  
Lead us from the land of scarcity.  
Deliver us from gnawing anxiety.  
Liberate us from the terror that our future depends on our own ingenuity.

Lead us from mere existence to Life.  
Teach us to trust you.  
Keep us from compromise.  
Make us faithfully bold.

May our lives resemble Jesus - individually and as churches.  
May we be the answer to the prayers of others.  
May we make a Jesus-shaped difference in our communities and our world,  
By your grace and by your Spirit. Amen.

Thursday 17th May Genesis 47: 21-26 A new economic model  
*The Rev'd Peter Rand is a retired URC minister and a member of Trinity Church, Bedlington*

As for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other. Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land. Then Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you; sow the land. And at the harvests you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones." They said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh." So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

When I am lonely.  
When I am surrounded by family and friends.  
For your constant patience and presence  
I offer you my thanks today. Amen

Tuesday 1st May Genesis 41: 53-57 Famine  
*The Rev'd Trevor Jamison is Environmental Chaplain for Eco-Congregation Scotland*

The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.' And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world

*Reflection*

Joseph **sold** the grain that was in the storehouses to the Egyptians, which doesn't sound very charitable. Fortunately for them the storehouses were chock full of grain, but where had it come from? Well, it turns out that Joseph, wielding his power as Pharaoh's right hand man, had appropriated it from those very same, now-starving, Egyptians in the first place (41:34).

Joseph took their grain and then, when they were in great need, he sold it back to them! We're used to seeing Joseph as the victim of others but it appears that the dreamer has a steelier side. Along with Jesus, whilst we might appreciate the sleight of hand, as wily as that of any serpent, we might wonder what has happened to Joseph's dove-like innocence.

Even the nicest of us, we are reminded, has a shadow side, but there are issues here beyond those of individual character. What do you do when you are in a position of responsibility and the demands are many but resources are few?

Personally, I can afford to buy a hungry person a meal but I don't have the money to feed a starving population.

Joseph had storehouses to build and a food supply system to maintain, and you don't put all of that together without (someone else's) money. Whether it should have been those who were starving who had to pay for it all – twice, once in kind and once in cash – is another matter.

In a world where millions starve today, and millions more go hungry, who do you think should have the authority to control food supplies? The government, the farmers, the consumers, the food sellers, or someone else? And whoever has that authority, how should they marry generosity and practicality for the benefit of all?

#### *Prayer*

Provident God, give me a spirit of generosity in responding to need  
And the wisdom to respond effectively. Amen

Wednesday 2nd May      Genesis 42: 1-5 To Egypt  
*Susan Henderson is an ordinand Scottish at the United Reformed Church and Congregational College*

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, 'Why do you keep looking at one another? I have heard', he said, 'that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.' So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

#### *Reflection*

Talk about having favourites!

We see within the first few verses of this chapter that Jacob is once again showing favouritism to one of his sons. Like Joseph, Benjamin is now the number 1 son, or so it would seem.

So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's.

#### *Reflection*

This story highlights the canniness of Joseph the royal administrator, right? Now read to the end of the section (v26). By exploiting the vulnerability of the people Pharaoh acquires all the money, land and the citizens as slaves in exchange for seed. In return, they produce crops, but tithe 20% to Pharaoh. He becomes the most powerful ruler in the region, presiding over one vast slave system. This is all Joseph's doing!

The Joseph story paves the way for Exodus. Israel does not belong in Egypt but in the land that God promised. Israel is not to live by the whim of Pharaoh, but by the grace of Yahweh – the God of the "little people" and the liberator of slaves.

Two related themes, then: living by faith in the promises of God, and the issue of daily bread. In Genesis Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all veer between trusting God and taking matters into their own hands. Here, Joseph uses his access to Empire to secure a future for his family (v27) by making Pharaoh rich. It's a smart move - how could God not approve? But as Brueggemann comments, "Joseph's shrewdness shows that entering the world of the empire brings dangers with it. The Egyptian empire offers food and therefore life. But it is never far from exploitation, oppression and slavery".

Joseph will provide what the people need ... at a price - their money and freedom. This is the way of Empire and the Market. It is compassionless.

That is why Jesus teaches us to ask God for daily bread. It comes with neither strings nor chains attached: we need; God loves. There is more than enough! The challenge for the Church today is to learn to trust God's promises of a future and provision for all we need. We learn that from following Jesus. It's the only way to resist the temptations of Empire and the Market; to sell our souls in exchange for the promise of a future.



## *Prayer*

Compassionate God,  
Be with your disciples and your churches today, as we try to lead lives of servanthood, caring for those who feel dispossessed, abandoned or lost. Help us to offer compassion at all times. Help us to forgive, if that is what is needed. Help us to respect our church and community families, and to make all decisions in a spirit of unity and sharing. Lord, we look to you for guidance as we try to go out to share your message in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the name of your son, Jesus Christ, Amen

Wednesday 16th May      Genesis 47: 13-20      Enriching Pharaoh  
*Lawrence Moore Mission & Discipleship consultant and member of Worsley Rd URC in Salford*

Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. Joseph collected all the money to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. When the money from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, 'Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone.' And Joseph answered, 'Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone.' So they brought their livestock to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. That year he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock. When that year was ended, they came to him the following year, and said to him, 'We cannot hide from my lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.'

But before this the chapter begins with Jacob learning that there was grain in Egypt – He would have heard this from the passing Caravans. He asks his sons why they have not thought about going to Egypt to buy grain and is confused by his sons' reactions, that they just keep looking at each other.

Is this the moment that the brothers have to face the reality of what they did – by having to go to the place they sold Joseph as a slave, not knowing the outcome of his fate? Are the brothers about to start their journey to repentance?

Jacob did not send Benjamin with his brothers – as the only son of Rachel, Jacob wanted to protect his son from harm. What harm? The harm that may happen on the journey or from his brothers? Did Jacob know or suspect all these years what they had done? Did Jacob not trust his other sons? But he sends his sons, not his servants, this job of buying grain to keep the family alive was too important a job, therefore he entrust his sons with it. Does this happen in our daily lives when circumstances force us to confront past sins head on?

Do we favour one over the other? What do we base this favouritism on? Those that are the same as us, think the same, have the same religion? And if we do how then do we see the other – with doubt, misgivings, or distrust?

Are we sent by our Father to reconcile the hurt we may have been part of, to make peace with our histories, personal or otherwise?

## *Prayer*

Loving God, as we start this day  
let us not show favouritism to anyone we meet,  
but meet them in love and kindness.  
Let us make amends for our past sins,  
Reconciling with those we may have hurt with our words or actions,  
Allowing us to make peace with our histories.  
In your name we pray. Amen

Thursday 3rd May    Genesis 42: 6-17    Behaving badly?

*The Rev'd David Salsbury is minister of Dyserth and Holywell and Training and Development Officer in the National Synod of Wales.*

Now Joseph was governor over the land; it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" They said to him, "No, my lord; your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies." But he said to them, "No, you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" They said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more." But Joseph said to them, "It is just as I have said to you; you are spies! Here is how you shall be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies." And he put them all together in prison for three days.

### *Reflection*

Remember those first two dreams, way back at the beginning of Chapter 37? (17th April 2018). The dreams that got Joseph's brothers so riled that they hated him even more? The one where Joseph's sheaf of corn rises over his brothers' sheaves and they bow down to it, followed quickly by the one where the sun, moon and eleven stars were all bowing down to Joseph? Yes, you remember them now, and so did Joseph as his brothers come to Egypt from their home in Canaan to buy food for their survival. They come in full submission, faces to the ground, bowing down before their unrecognised brother who, in a sheer reversal of roles, now holds all the aces. I'll leave it to later writers to determine whether this 'dream come true' is the stuff of nightmares or is, in fact, a blessing in disguise.

### *Reflection*

At first glance, it seems unlikely that this little story, rooted in a culture lost over millennia, could speak to us. However, there are plenty of messages for individuals and churches as the story of Joseph unfolds.

Following rejection and suffering caused by jealous brothers, escapades worthy of any adventure-book hero, and a prolonged, forced absence from family, Joseph now has a high-profile, high-office position in Pharaoh's palace, where he is trusted, respected and known as an excellent listener. His family however, has hit some very hard times, and finally make their way to Joseph, looking for help.

Joseph welcomes them with open arms, is not ashamed of his relations and introduces them to his boss. One feature of this period was the importance of family, and here we see family love enduring beyond challenges that we in today's culture might consider insurmountable. Joseph doesn't only welcome them, he works with Pharaoh to provide them with a good place to live, and Pharaoh offers them some shepherding work with his own flock.

When Joseph's father, Jacob is introduced, Pharaoh accepts blessings from him and asks his age - indicating respect for the older generation – even though Jacob suggests that, at a mere 130, he is relatively young!

What message does all this hold for modern-day discipleship and Church? Joseph cared for his brothers in their time of trouble regardless of what had gone before. He didn't take decisions on his own; instead he discussed and managed the choices, ensuring that Pharaoh agreed with every idea - he was an excellent listener. Both Joseph and Pharaoh respected immediate, and extended, family, deferring to the older generation. Together they ensured the ongoing care of a displaced group of people and their extended families.

Today's Western culture may not place so much emphasis on family ties, but 21<sup>st</sup> Century disciples and churches (whether new expressions, or traditional) are called to offer unconditional hospitality, listening, welcome and care as they serve the neediest people.

Keep company with us along our way.  
Create amongst us a welcome and a warmth  
That can turn strangers into friends,  
Divisions into healing,  
Mistrust into hope,  
Indifference into kindness.  
As Joseph prepared to welcome Jacob  
Prepare us for each day's encounters with others.  
We ask it in the name of he who was a stranger  
Who came to welcome all of us home.  
Amen.

Tuesday 15th May    Genesis 47: 1-12    Settling in Egypt  
*Linda Rayner, URC Co-ordinator for Fresh Expressions of Church*

So Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; they are now in the land of Goshen." From among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were." They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to reside as aliens in the land; for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, we ask you, let your servants settle in the land of Goshen." Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?" Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn." Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed. And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

What is striking is the suspicion that Joseph had of his brother's motives. We might say he was just playing them along, accusing them of spying, making them wait and jump through various hoops before he would help. After all, they deserved nothing from him did they, after the way they had treated him?

I fear there is something in his attitude that lingers today when people who are hungry seek help, whether that be from international aid organisations or the local food bank. We like to be generous, provided it's on our terms. We need to remain in control, lest those who are in need begin to take advantage. We want to make sure their needs are genuine so we set conditions and expect hoops to be jumped through. I'm sure Joseph didn't intend his actions to be interpreted this way, but then neither do we!

We might dream of a time when all people who are hungry will be fed. Until that time the least we can do is treat those who come to us with dignity and respect rather than demean them further.

*Prayer*

Generous God,  
when we are confronted by hunger,  
asked for our help,  
and challenged to give,  
may compassion fill our hearts,  
and kindness be on our lips  
that we might follow the example of Jesus  
and go the extra mile.  
So may the hungry may be satisfied  
and our need of you increased.  
In Jesus name, Amen

Friday 4th May    Genesis 42: 18-25    Love breaking through  
*Helen Wilson, Local Preacher, South East Northumberland Ecumenical Area.*

On the third day Joseph said to them, 'Do this and you will live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here where you are imprisoned. The rest of you shall go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be

verified, and you shall not die.’ And they agreed to do so. They said to one another, ‘Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this anguish has come upon us.’ Then Reuben answered them, ‘Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.’ They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter. He turned away from them and wept; then he returned and spoke to them. And he picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes. Joseph then gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return every man’s money to his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. This was done for them.

### *Reflection*

Many of us make mountains out of molehills brooding over slights and insults. Not knowing the full story, we often read more into an event than was ever there: that friend didn’t wave back because of a secret hatred; your father-in-law is late because you’re not good enough for his family; your boss never invites you for coffee because you do a bad job.

Having suffered so badly, Joseph surely built up mental images of his brothers celebrating his absence and living far better lives than his own. His heart must have been hardened against them - until he heard them talking and was moved to tears by love. A love restored by hearing that Reuben had pleaded for him. A love restored by finding out that his brothers had not only been thinking about him, but felt guilt about their misdeeds. A love that knew these statements were true reflections of what was in his brothers’ hearts.

Most of us are never privy to what others think of us so we might never find out that we were not seen by a friend in the street who was worrying about a doctor’s appointment. We might never know that our father-in-law tends to be late because his arthritis is bad on a morning. We might never discover that our boss doesn’t need to invite us for coffee and “a chat” because she views us as reliable. When we feel neglected or insulted, we can choose how to react: assume the hurt was caused deliberately or assume it wasn’t. As followers of Christ, we are called to respond always through love and that means asking for clarification when we are confused by somebody’s actions and it means letting love break through any resentment we might feel.

wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. Israel said, ‘Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die.’

### *Reflection*

This chapter of Genesis takes us first to the reunion between Joseph and his brothers and then to the ripples of that reunion reaching out from Egypt to embrace Jacob in the land of Canaan. The brothers are sent on their way now as messengers of the deepest joy. They arrive home laden with the treasures that speak of blessing offered not simply by Joseph, but by Pharaoh himself. Egypt is opening its doors to this alien household and sends the waggons that will gather them all in; hospitality to strangers is assured because Joseph is already known and loved. The invitation is enough to revive Jacob as if almost a resurrection.

The resonances to our day are striking, aren’t they? People are travelling. Across borders people flee as lone individuals and as huddled masses. We are tempted to bracket them such that economic migrants seeking better lives are far less welcome than those in fear of torture and death. Yet all may well have paid the traffickers, lost everything and risked their lives simply to stand upon our soil. My son is now working with refugees in Derby. He can retell stories of the deepest human suffering and the brutal harshness of our “hospitality”.

We need to read and reread this story of people travelling and of families reunited across the impossible miles. We need to hear of a father’s broken heart mended by a reunion he never thought possible. We need to notice those around us who are longing for even a tiny glimmer of welcome and of love. We need to notice that God’s unfolding story is very much a story of migration being a blessing and welcome being a need. In my heart as in my church what are the deep attitudes shaping how we respond to the stranger, to the traveller, to the newcomer seeking shelter?

### *Prayer*

Gracious God, travelling with us,  
Open our hearts and homes to welcome others in.  
As you travelled the ancient road from Egypt to Canaan and back again

thing. How much do we challenge ourselves to do this, to tell people about God's awesome wonder in our everyday lives?

"You shall go out with joy" is the song that comes to mind when reading this Psalm. You **SHALL**, no back-sies! We've been commanded to go out and celebrate the good news, it's our role as Christians. And as the United Reformed Church as we begin to embark on this journey of Missional Discipleship, this need to sing God's praises is more prevalent than ever. It's necessarily, it's **VITAL**. It should be a core part of our lives, not something we do on a Sunday.

### *Prayer*

The Lord to be Praised,  
Help us to learn of your love for us,  
Help us to be guided to singing your name  
Send us out with joy, and lead us forth with peace,  
So that we may sing of your glory, and of your might.  
So that at your name, every knee shall bow.  
Amen

Monday 14th May    Genesis 45: 21-28    Jacob amazed  
*The Rev'd Neil Thorogood is Principal of the URC's Westminster College in Cambridge*

The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. To his father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, 'Do not quarrel along the way.'

So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. And they told him, 'Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt.' He was stunned; he could not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the

Gracious God, as you have given all of us the benefit of the doubt on so many occasions, we ask that you give us the grace to do the same for others. Allow resentment to be displaced by love in our hearts. Amen.

Saturday 5th May    Genesis 42: 26-48    The puzzle deepens  
*The Rev'd Bachelard Kaze, Minister - Heanor and Eastwood URCs*

They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed. When one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money at the top of the sack. He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in my sack!" At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us, and charged us with spying on the land. But we said to him, 'We are honest men, we are not spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. Bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will release your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'"

As they were emptying their sacks, there in each one's sack was his bag of money. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. And their father Jacob said to them, "I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!" Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should come to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

### Reflection

We may be familiar with people who feel persecuted in life or dream, only to discover that it is God who is actually wrestling to bless them.

In this story, Joseph's brothers have carried the yoke of their sin against Joseph for very long. I was particularly struck by the fact that they were fearful after finding the coins in their bags. Why is it not seen as a favour or blessing? Could it be that they are haunted by shadows from their past? The fact that they were also given provisions for their journey shows that Joseph meant to bless them rather than trapping them.

More generally, I wonder whether a similar paranoia can occur in our dealings with God? Could God's attempt to bless unrepentant sinners come across as persecution or traps? Unresolved conflicts in our lives could potentially have the same effect, pushing us even to wrestle with God and people who are just trying to bless us. This perhaps highlights the importance of repentance, so that one can better receive love. Can we genuinely give others the benefit of the doubt until we can give it to ourselves? Unconfessed sins have the potential to damage our self-esteem, making us believe that we are undeserving of any favour. They can also make us blind to God's good plans. It is very sad that one can also drag innocent people (like poor, old Jacob) in that contagious paranoia, taking the shape of a vicious cycle.

Sadly we are surrounded by people who struggle to receive love and favours even from God, who is always much more gracious than we can fathom.

### Prayer

Gracious God,  
Give us the humility to confess our sins to those we have wounded,  
the audacity to believe that you can forgive what looks unforgivable,  
and the blessed assurance to accept that you always wish us well Amen

We are sorry when we hoard things for ourselves  
and fail to extend those gifts to others  
We ask your forgiveness.

We ask that today, as we ponder the generosity of a long-dead Pharaoh, we may be open-hearted and open-handed with those we encounter today.  
For the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen

Sunday 13th May

Psalm 47

*Dan Morrell is the Immediate-Past Moderator of Youth Assembly, attending St Andrew's URC, Roundhay.*

1 All nations, clap your hands  
and shout!  
Let joyful cries to God ring out!  
2 How awesome is the LORD  
Most High,  
Great King who rules the earth  
throughout!

3 He has subdued beneath our feet  
The nations who had been our foes.

4 In blessing Jacob, whom he loved,  
A heritage for us he chose.

5 God has gone up  
with shouts of joy,  
The LORD amid the trumpets'  
sound.  
6 Sing praise, sing praise to God  
Most High;  
To God our King let praise abound.

7 For God is King of all the earth;  
Sing psalms of praise to him alone.

8 God rules the nations  
from on high;  
He sits upon his holy throne.

9 The leaders of the nations come  
To yield themselves to Abr'ham's God.  
To him belong the shields of earth;  
Exalted greatly is the LORD!

### Reflection

Poetry has never been my strong suit. I struggle to see past a poem that doesn't rhyme so I'm glad this Psalm translation does. Beyond the pretty rhyming couplets we see instructions, a sending out for us all to go and sing the praises of our God to others. This is no mean feat, it's relatively easy for us to sing God's praises in church on Sunday, especially when everyone else is doing that same

charged to say, “Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.”

### *Reflection*

High above Swaledale sits the ruins of a chapel once used as a hunting lodge but given by Lord Wharton (of Bible gifts fame) as a chapel for the Dissenters in the Dale. Their successors have come down now to the village of Low Row and, along with the other Christians in the Dale, have formed links with refugees in Middlesborough. Not just giving ‘stuff’ but inviting the refugees to events in the Dale where stories are told of each others’ lives. The Embroidery Guild and Middlesborough guests had a wonderful day together sharing their mutual interest, while the children had a marvellous ‘outdoor pursuits’ experience provided by Marrick Priory.

The market town of Northallerton have received, like many communities throughout the UK, Syrian refugees through the Refugee Council scheme. The churches in the town have again been active in welcoming the families and helping them ‘make a house a home’.

Pharaoh’s generous welcome and offer of hospitality reminds us that Christians are not the only people who can offer a place of refuge and hope to those fleeing their own land for whatever reason- natural disaster, or human-made. Whilst we know the end of the story under another Pharaoh, let us stop for a moment and remind ourselves that this Pharaoh did offer sanctuary to Joseph’s far extended family, but he went beyond just a welcome, he gave the best land and wagons to bring the vulnerable to this haven.

May we be touched too with this spirit of lavish hospitality – going beyond the immediate needs of refugees and asylum seekers in our communities – and, like the people of the dales open up opportunities for learning from each other in mutual respect.

### *Prayer*

Gracious God,  
We thank you that you are a God of generosity and indeed lavishness.

Sunday 6th May

Psalm 46

*The Rev’d Lindsey Sanderson Minister, East Kilbride and Hamilton Joint Pastorate.*

1 God is our refuge & our strength,  
our ever-present aid;  
2 And therefore,  
though the earth gives way,  
we will not be afraid.

Though mountains fall into the sea,  
3 though waters foam and roar,  
We will not fear,  
though mountains quake  
as waves engulf the shore.

4 A river flows,  
whose streams delight  
the city of our God—  
The holy place, in which the LORD  
Most High has his abode.

5 God is within his holy place;  
the city will not yield,  
For God will come at break of day  
to be her help and shield.

6 The nations are in disarray;  
the kingdoms disappear.  
God speaks, and at his mighty voice  
the whole earth melts with fear.

### *Reflection*

‘Be still and know that I am God.’

It can be a challenge to be still.

7 The LORD Almighty is with us  
to strengthen and sustain;  
For Jacob’s God our strong defence  
and fortress will remain.

8 Come, see the works  
the LORD has done—  
the judgments he commands,  
The desolations he has brought  
to pass in many lands.

9 In every land  
throughout the earth  
he makes all conflict cease;  
He shatters bow & spear & shield,  
and brings his reign of peace.

10 Be still, and know that I am God,  
on earth exalted high;  
And all the nations of the world  
my name will glorify.

11 The LORD Almighty is with us  
to strengthen and sustain;  
For Jacob’s God our strong defence  
and fortress will remain.

We live in a culture which bombards us with images and words 24/7 to such extremes that we are in danger of becoming unwitting voyeurs of other people's misery and misfortune. Success is measured in growth and productivity and being busy; indeed, being overly or constantly busy is a badge of honour whether in employment, or retirement, or leisure time.

It can be a challenge to be still.

Even in moments when we rest our bodies our 'monkey minds' leap from one idea to the next, often stimulated by the constant presence of social media with its 'like' and 'emoji' commentary on life.

It can be a challenge to be still. And yet it can also be a liberation.

To sit and feel your heart beat and know the intimate connection with the God who loves you and whose covenant with you is written on your heart.

To rest and breathe with your whole being and know that with each breath the Spirit connects you to the whole of creation.

To stop and listen to the soundscape around you and know the joy of the birdsong, the creativity which led to the rumble of traffic, the happiness of laughter and song but also know the pain in a child's cry, the trauma in each act of violence and the despair in each experience of loss and yet know that God is present in each and every situation.

Be still and know that I am God. Be still. Be freed and in the stillness know that God is our place of safety and our life-force each and every day.

### *Prayer*

Holy and Eternal God, still my body, mind and spirit.  
As I consciously come into your presence  
empty me of all that commands my attention and  
liberate me from the domineering busyness of the world  
so that I may love you with all of my being and praise your Holy name,  
provider of refuge and source of strength. Amen.

forgiven. All the unresolved feelings, kept buried for years, swept over him, and the man who governed Egypt could not govern his own tears.

The spectre of the past is suddenly a present reality. But Joseph has changed: he is able to see the past and the present from a new perspective – it is the hand of a loving God which has brought his brothers into his power and so prepared the salvation of their people, with bread and forgiveness.

In the prayer which Jesus taught his followers, the only two petitions are for daily bread and forgiveness. It is only by sharing both that we can bring justice and peace to our divided world.

### **Prayer**

Unchanging God,  
when past memories haunt us  
and we cherish old grudges,  
forgive us for yesterday and for today.

When we come face to face  
with things we hide even from ourselves,  
remind us that your constant love  
understands and forgives us all.

When a new future calls  
give us courage to walk in hope  
and share bread and forgiveness  
that your kingdom may come. Amen

Saturday 12th May    Genesis 45: 16-20    Welcome to the refugees  
*The Rev'd Hilary Collinson a Minister in the Tees and Swale Pastorate*

When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, 'Joseph's brothers have come', Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Say to your brothers, "Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan. Take your father and your households and come to me, so that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you may enjoy the fat of the land.'" You are further



years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh and Lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, "Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds and all that you have. I will provide for you there— since there are five more years of famine to come— so that you and your household and all that you have will not come to poverty." And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honoured in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.' then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

### *Reflection*

Joseph never forgot that he was an exile, separated from his family as a result of his own youthful arrogance, his father's indulgence and his brothers' jealousy. His first son was called Manasseh (*causing to forget*), for, Joseph said, *God has made me forget all my troubles and my father's family* (Gen. 41:51). But the name itself was a constant reminder. Joseph hadn't forgotten; he had simply buried the memory deep inside himself, and with it all the anger, distress, hurt and sadness too painful to be borne.

Nor had his brothers forgotten. As soon as their mission to buy grain began to go wrong, their first thought was that they were being punished because of Joseph.

Now Joseph and his brothers stand face to face. There is fear in the room; there is guilt as they all remember the past. There is despair. There is pain – the deep hurt of past sins.

The teller of this ancient story knows how to describe overwhelming emotion. Joseph's weeping echoed through the house. Joseph needed reconciliation as much as his brothers did. The past cannot be forgotten until it has been

Monday 7th May      Genesis 43: 1-15      Back they go again  
*The Rev'd Gethin Rhys is National Assembly Policy Officer for Cytun (Churches Together in Wales) and a member of Parkminster URC, Cardiff.*

Now the famine was severe in the land. And when they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little more food." But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; but if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'" Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?" They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?" Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy with me, and let us be on our way, so that we may live and not die—you and we and also our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; you can hold me accountable for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice."

Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry them down as a present to the man—a little balm and a little honey, gum, resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the top of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, so that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, as well as Benjamin. Then they went on their way down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

### *Reflection*

My guess is that most readers of these Daily Devotions lead relatively comfortable lives. I certainly lead a very comfortable and contented life. But many people in today's world live lives where there is a daily choice between

feeding themselves and feeding their children; feeding anyone in the family and keeping their children safe.

We may find it difficult to understand how child refugees have been sent alone to 'safety' by their parents, or how children may be sold for exploitation by their own parents, who are glad that at least their new masters will feed them. This is not just a phenomenon of distant countries; the children exploited on the 'county lines' trafficking drugs to and from our cities in the UK are in some cases the victims of such terrible situations. If you volunteer in your local Food bank or debt counselling network you will have heard similar stories many times.

This ancient story is therefore frighteningly contemporary. The famine is so severe that Judah has no choice but to risk Benjamin's life by sending him along with his older brothers to beg for more food from the capricious satrap who now rules Egypt. Judah's words "As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved" is one of the most heart-rending in scripture. It is even more heart-rending to realise that it is spoken every day around the world in 2018.

#### *Prayer*

Loving God,  
as I read this familiar story from scripture,  
help me not to sentimentalise it  
or turn it into a soap opera.  
Rather, may my reading of it be earthed  
in the experiences of parents around the world  
and parents in the next street  
who do not know where the next meal will come from  
and have no choice but to risk their children now in the hope of food later.  
And if this story still disturbs me,  
send me to the foodbank with some tins and some time  
and gear me up for Christian Aid Week 2018. Amen.

Tuesday 8th May      Genesis 43: 16-34      The family reunion  
*The Rev'd Dr Susan Durber is Minister of Taunton URC.*

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, 'Why do you keep looking at one another? I have heard', he said, 'that there is grain in

Now, I love my brothers and sisters (at LEAST 72% of the time) but would I be strong enough to offer myself in their place? It might take a bit of soul-searching that one.

And it doesn't take a Biblical scholar to see parallels with the New Testament. Someone who sacrifices himself for the benefit of others, someone who was dearly loved by his Father, to someone who would 'come back from the dead' and isn't recognised by those who were once close to him.

Thank goodness that in Jesus we had, we have, someone who was prepared to make that sacrifice.

#### *Prayer*

Lord, we thank you for your sacrifice that set us free.  
We offer to you our free lives,  
to do your work, to be your hands.  
We know that this will mean  
that we will have to make sacrifices and yet we say:  
"Here I am, Lord, send me"

Friday 11th May      Genesis 45: 1-15      Revealed  
*The Rev'd Heather Pencavel, retired minister and member of Thornbury URC,  
South Gloucestershire.*

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, 'Send everyone away from me.' So no-one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two

you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, so that I may set my eyes on him.' We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.' When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother goes with us, will we go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to Sheol.' Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became surety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I will bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.' Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father."

### *Reflection*

"Here I am Lord, send me." Ok, that passage from Isaiah is the wrong passage – but it's the same sentiment. It speaks of self-sacrifice, just as Judah offered himself to Joseph as a slave in place of Benjamin. Self-sacrifice for the benefit of someone else – not just Benjamin, but also his father who needed Benjamin to look after him – having lost Joseph, his favourite, due to the plotting and jealousy of Joseph's brothers, and believed him to be dead.

We read on and, of course, the father finds out that Joseph is not dead, but is still alive. I bet there was a party. There usually was when these things happened. Any excuse.

It also reminds me of any number of detective stories when someone will falsely confess to having committed a crime so that someone they love, who was actually guilty, might be set free.

Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.' So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

### *Reflection*

I once read a book about Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights* that showed me that the story that I had thought of as a high romance was profoundly formed by political events. It was a book shaped by the 'great hunger' of Ireland every bit as much as it was the story of a relationship between Kathy and Heathcliff. I realized how much my own reading of a story had been shaped by popular music and film (Kate Bush, but also Merle Oberon and Laurence Olivier) as well as by my own longing for wild romance – and how I had managed to ignore the famine.

Some themes of the story of Joseph have also been marginalised from many of our popular readings. In Western culture particularly, the story of Joseph and his brothers is a family drama, or the story of the personal development of an individual. This seems to us the obvious and natural way to read this story. But it is also a story about politics and poverty, about slavery and oppression, about famine and economic migrants. There are others in the world who can help us read it that way. The story of Joseph is the story of how the people of Israel became slaves in Egypt and how the land of Egypt all came to be owned by Pharaoh alone. This is why Joseph remains an ambiguous character in Jewish tradition. He is not the star of a musical, but the one who helped Pharaoh enslave Israel and impoverish Egypt.

At this point of the story, there is a famine – and a famine is not just a plot device, but an experience and a political reality. It shouldn't be ignored, just as the famines in the nineteenth century should never have been explained away or exploited, and just as the famines today should never be forgotten.

### *Prayer*

O God, give me grace and imagination  
to see the world through the eyes of the hungry.

O God, give me strength and courage,  
to hear the voices of the most vulnerable.  
O God, give me wisdom and insight,  
no longer to look only with my own eyes,  
but to have my vision changed  
and my perspective shifted,  
for the sake of all your people. Amen.

Wednesday 9th May Genesis 44: 1-13 Trickery  
*The Rev'd Branwen Rees, East Wales Regional Minister*

Then he commanded the steward of his house, 'Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the top of his sack. Put my cup, the silver cup, in the top of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain.' And he did as Joseph told him. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. When they had gone only a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, 'Go, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, "Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup? Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this."' "

When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them. They said to him, 'Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover, the rest of us will become my lord's slaves.' He said, 'Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free.' Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. He searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. At this they tore their clothes. Then each one loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

### *Reflection*

Thanks to Messrs Lloyd-Webber and Rice, this oh so familiar story of Joseph hurtles towards its climax. Talk about role reversal – the once powerful,

bullying brothers are at the mercy of their unrecognised brother. The previously arrogant Joseph now sees his opportunity - was he out to test his brothers to see if they had changed their ways or was this simple revenge?

How often are we presented with such a moment – a chance to say, 'I told you so', an opportunity to get our own back on someone who has slighted us, maybe even years earlier? It is so tempting to take the opportunity, after all what is it they say, 'revenge is a dish best served cold'. Social media has certainly made it easier for people to retaliate - be it revenge porn or simple rumour spreading; even better when it can be done anonymously behind a keyboard.

If you don't know already, you'll have to wait a few days to find out what Joseph did, but every day we hold power over people – what do we do, do we genuinely forgive and forget, or do we listen to that voice which says, 'go on, do it, make them suffer as you have'?

### *Prayer*

Lord, we have enormous power for good or ill, help us, in our daily lives, to make the right choice, for as the psalmist said, 'walk away from evil and do good ... for the Lord loves what is right'. Amen

Thursday 10th May Genesis 44: 14-34 Judah pleads  
*Leo Roberts CYDO, NW Synod*

Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house while he was still there; and they fell to the ground before him. Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that one such as I can practice divination?" And Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; here we are then, my lord's slaves, both we and also the one in whose possession the cup has been found." But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father." Then Judah stepped up to him and said, "O my lord, let your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead; he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' Then