

Sunday 30th August 2020

Our worship this week is based on a poll of favourite hymns and bible passages amongst the five congregations. As the hymns chosen are all subject to copyright you will find them as suggested hymns with a link to an online recording. The most popular story was Joseph, and the most popular bible passage was Psalm 23, and we will weave an exploration of these around the hymns. Another passage which cropped up was Ecclesiastes 3 and this will be used as a basis for our prayers.

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us; though separate let us worship together in God.

Suggested Hymn

Great is thy faithfulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKlqmdfHsk>

Prayer

Loving God, ever present, ever faithful, as we gather in the name of Jesus, we come to praise you and give thanks. Every day we are surrounded by messages of your love, in the blessing of a new day, in the friendship of others, in the opportunities to be inspired, and in the challenges that help us grow. When we live in your love, and journey on the way of Jesus, we know that everything we need is provided and we thank you.

Our world is your joyful creation, with its variety of species and climate. Each season brings something different and whilst we may have favourites, we know that we need the gifts of each season to make our planet the source of life. We know we need day and night, times of activity and times of relaxation, and we thank you for the variety of life.

Every day we make choices and recognise that they are not always the wisest choice, but you love surrounds us in good times and bad, and your mercy has no end. In unconditional love we find forgiveness, and in response we seek to learn from our mistakes and share your love more faithfully. Eternal and loving God for your love and mercy we give your thanks and praise, and in the guidance of the Spirit we find our hope for tomorrow.

The Lord's prayer

Reading

Psalm 23

The Joseph Quiz

We all know the story of Joseph, either through Sunday School or courtesy of the musical, but how well do we really know the story? Before we start exploring the story of Joseph here are a few questions to ponder. They highlight how little of the detail of the story we actually remember so as we read through the story look out for any answers you don't know.

Can you name the twelve sons of Jacob, in order of birth, and do you know their birth mother?

Where was Joseph born?

Where all the brothers born there?

Where did Joseph grow up?

How old was Joseph when his brothers plotted against him?

Which brother was missing when Joseph was sold to the Midianites?

How long did Joseph spend in prison?

How old was Joseph when he became Pharaoh's right-hand man?

How many children did Joseph have?

Jacob was buried in Canaan but where was Joseph buried and how old was he when he died?

Introduction to the story

The story of Joseph sits between the founding of Israel through the patriarchs and some matriarchs, and the founding story of Israel's journeys. Joseph is blessed, just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were

blessed, a sign that God is with him, and that through Joseph his brothers and subsequently the twelve tribes of Israel are blessed.

The story of Joseph is a story of life, of choices both good and bad, and the ups and downs that those choices bring. It is also a story about dreams. Dreams in the bible come in many forms, normal dreams, dreams of the future, visions, and nightmares, and when we take time to reflect on them dreams can be meaningful and helpful. During lockdown it is reported that people were dreaming more, what was actually happening was that more dreams were being remembered. It is recognised that dreams happen during our REM period of sleep, which is most prevalent just before we wake up, it is also recognised that we are more likely to remember dreams when we awake naturally. During lockdown there was less need to set the alarm for many people hence more remembered dreams. Although there is no direct involvement narrated within the story of Joseph, there are plenty of references to God and we are left in little doubt that God is with Joseph throughout, in the good times and the bad.

Read Genesis Chapter 37

Reflect

Anyone who is different can find themselves set apart, shut out from the crowd. Often the difference is a perceived difference, a judgement on the part of the crowd; sometimes the difference is to do with how we are treated by others. Jacob's adoration of Joseph set him apart. When we look at this story we reflect that the way Joseph responded to Jacob's actions is a little like the way Israel responded to the being God's chosen people. Being chosen is no guarantee of an easy life and God's presence is no guarantee of protection against the ill-advised actions of others. However, we can draw strength from the presence of God in our lives and find hope even in the worst of times.

Suggested Hymn

Be still for the presence of the Lord

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5S_-zhHfDA

Read Genesis Chapter 39

Reflect

Joseph is sold as a slave but makes the best of it. He is obedient, works hard and is well rewarded. He finds himself once again in a position of privilege, however, things once again go wrong. Potiphar's wife has designs on Joseph, but he does not play along. Maybe this is the first time anyone has stood up to her, she does not like it and has a tantrum. Her actions attract a crowd and her husband, and she takes revenge on Joseph by fabricating a wicked lie which results in Joseph being imprisoned for something he has not done. We recognize this storyline from many dramas and from real life. We know that when people don't get their way they can become petulant and then when they find themselves the centre of attention they need to justify their actions and they weave a story that bears little resemblance to truth.

Joseph pleads his innocence but who is Potiphar going to believe? When we watch the news or read sensational headlines perhaps we need to remember the story of Joseph and seek the truth rather than believing a story created to sell papers.

Read Genesis Chapters 40 and 41

Reflect

Joseph was first flung in a well and then into a prison. This was a story to inspire the people of Israel when things went wrong.

In the joy of the moment we can all get carried away and make promises that are forgotten along with the bad experience. However, when it mattered Pharaoh's wine-taster remembered, he made a connection. Remembering bad experiences is important both as individuals and as a society.

- Remembering helps us to keep faith as we recognise God's presence in the hard times.
- Remembering helps us to grow, and become wiser, which enables us to do things differently in the future. That is why it is so important that we have Remembrance Day and Holocaust Memorial Day.

- Remembering puts us in a better place to help others, empathy rather than sympathy makes us more inclined to seek change.

Pharaoh's dreams might seem obvious but Joseph, relying on God, re-interpreted the outcome. He shows how the dreams can be used to help avoid the famine they show. Being responsible and careful can and always will better preserve the future. Joseph did not doubt his ability to hear God, he did not worry about giving a message that may not be well received, he was faithful to the call of God.

Suggested hymn

I, the Lord of sea and sky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhTpidrLf0s>

Read Genesis Chapters 42-45

Reflect

Joseph's encounter with his brothers opens up all the feelings he had forgotten and he wrestles with his relationship with them. He hopes they had become wiser and he recognises that in many ways he has benefitted from their actions, but can he forgive them? It is a question most of us wrestle with at some time in our lives. Joseph does not judge, he finds a way of determining, there is a huge difference. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not always the same thing. Reconciliation involves more than forgiveness; it asks more of us and means moving forward into a new relationship. Joseph's actions are not only to help him, they are a way to enable his brothers to recognise how they have changed. Their actions when Benjamin is accused reveal the change in them and Joseph knows what matters most, he has missed his brothers as well as his Father and he offers the blessing of reconciliation. Surely we hope and pray that we will do no less if we find ourselves in a similar situation.

Suggested hymn

Make me a channel of your peace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daGWdbrSGBM>

Psalm 23 reminds us of God's eternal presence, for those who have grown up in church it offers a way of expressing the things we believe. However, for those on the edge of church or finding their way without the experience of understanding church language the words can be difficult. Below you will find a restatement of the essence of Psalm 23 using concepts more familiar to our twenty-first century understanding of the world and of God. They also offer those familiar with the Psalm an opportunity to revisit and reflect on how they understand those traditional words.

I am a part of creation,
the source of all being guides my path,
I am never alone.

In creation I find fulfilment,
places of reflection, inspiration and
restoration;
hill and vale, sea and stream,
the stars and the depths,
when I am aware of my connectedness
I cannot get lost.

Even in the depths I am never alone
and need not fear,
for love surrounds me and holds me.

Everything I need and more
is provided by creation,
only my actions and those of others
can withhold what I need.

In oneness there is only love,
a giving from others;
I am always connected,
my whole life and beyond is part of creation.
I am always with the source of all being,
the eternal essence of creation.

I am one with all there is.

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Prayers of concern and commitment

Loving God, creator and source of all being, you know our hearts better than we know them but as we worship, we offer you our prayers for the world and the church's place within it. We recognise the nature of our world, its cycles and seasons, and we pray for understanding in the way we respond to the changing patterns of life. Everything has its place and its time.

We celebrate with those blessed with a new life in their family and we cry with those who have lost a loved one. May we trust in you to find the words we need to offer comfort and hope.

We are more aware than ever of the changes that are happening all around us as we find a new way in a strange world. We pray for courage to let go of the things that endanger lives and the inspiration to envision a new way of being. We celebrate with those who have survived infection and cry with those who have lost employment and face an uncertain future. May we find a way of sharing our blessings with those in distress.

We give thanks for those who have put their lives on hold to serve others, especially those in the medical profession and carers in all situations. They have faced so many difficulties and challenges but through it all they have held the hands of those dying and losing loved ones and celebrated with those who are recovering. We pray for those who are seeking solutions that will enable us all to live with Covid 19. May we find ways to support and encourage those who are serving us in so many different ways.

We pray for those places in the world where the death rate continues to rise, and healthcare is less efficient. We pray for people who are struggling with Covid 19 on top of their daily struggle to survive in the midst of poverty and injustice. May our lives reflect the generosity of your love.

We pray for the places in our world where freedom of speech cannot be taken for granted, and dictators follow a path that is less than loving. We pray for your kingdom of justice and peace and for a time when we can all dance together holding hands and sharing the goodness of the world's harvest regardless of colour or creed. May our lives reflect the peace of your love.

Loving God, when we struggle to understand why things happen may we trust in you and make the best of things, serving others with joy and compassion, and living together as one with you and all creation. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Our offering to God.

As we continue to worship apart but together, let us pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church by continuing to send our offering and exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know God's blessing on all we do. Amen

Suggested hymn

Lord of all hopefulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCBjxVP6GWE>

Blessing

May the blessing that is the knowledge of God, source of all being, the love of God discovered through Jesus and the inspiration of the Spirit which binds us together be with us on our journey this day and every day. Amen.