

Bible Study
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 14, Year A
August 13, 2017

[RCL] Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Our reading today begins with the note that it is “the story of the family of Jacob.” Of course, for the last few chapters of Genesis, we’ve been hearing about Jacob and his family—his parents, his in-laws, his wives, and all their tricks and travails. A study of this week’s reading would benefit from a quick review of what comes before. What does the Bible tell us about this family? How have its members spoken to God? In what manner have they followed God’s will? As many commentators have remarked, the brevity of this literature goes hand-in-hand with its psychological complexity. The entire story of Joseph tells us about God and God’s relationship to us in a much more complex way than “lessons” or moral summations.

- Has there been a time when you have had something of value (beautiful objects, a position of power, someone’s love) which other people did not have? How might this experience inform your reading of the story? After thinking about it, does any word or phrase stand out to you?
- Has there been a time when you have watched someone else receive or achieve something of value that you did not have? How might this experience inform your reading of the story? After thinking about it, does any word or phrase stand out to you?
- What other stories from Genesis does this first excerpt recall?

Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b

Our Collect of the Day asks for the Spirit to think and do what is right, and this Psalm elaborates on how we might also make steps towards that with God’s help—by giving thanks to God, by continually seeking him, and by remembering what he has done. The Psalm also offers another interpretation of the Joseph story (echoing how Joseph himself will interpret it near the end), that God steered the events from the start, sending a famine and testing Joseph in his struggles. This appointed reading is a carefully cut excerpt from a long Psalm full of history, and this portion on Joseph comes in the middle (not chronologically). For the Psalmist, the whole ordeal is, as we see in the last verse, a reason for exclaiming, “Hallelujah!”

- The Psalmist calls us to remember the marvels God has done, including “his wonders and the judgments of his mouth.” When you remember how God has acted in your life, what are some of the marvels he has done?
- Do you agree with the interpretation in verse 16—that God sent a famine to the land? Keeping in mind that there is a range of orthodox beliefs on this topic, consider discussing how God intervenes in our lives and in the life of the world. How have you understood the mixture of challenges and blessings in your own life?

Romans 10:5-15

Romans is a theologically complex and occasionally stylistically baffling long work of the Apostle. This portion of Romans is a delightfully typical rush of clauses and phrases, running like an enthusiastic preacher's poetic logic from one to another. The verse which asks us to confess with our lips and believe with our hearts is one that has been often used in some churches to suggest that only a moment of verbal confession is what "salvation" really means. But Paul then talks about justification (the English translation of a word from Greek, which was used to translate the Hebrew word for righteousness) as well as salvation, and emphasizes this with two citations about Jesus' acceptance of all who turn to him. The final paragraph is a rush of movement from this moment of belief out of the door, into the streets, on the beautiful feet of a bearer of good tidings—that's us!

- What do you think it means to "believe in" Christ? How has your own belief come about in your life, and how has it changed over time?
- When have you asked God for help before?
- How do you understand being sent out to share the news about Christ?

Matthew 14:22-33

The disciples have had a hard time of it of late, what with parables they truly couldn't parse and mistakes over who would be feeding whom. Their confusion continues here when they greet a sign of power with fear, and Peter rises from fear to trust to fear again. Jesus' question about doubt goes unanswered. In chapter 13, we had heard parable upon parable about the kingdom of heaven. This story comes near the end of chapter 14, which begins with John the Baptist's beheading and continues with the feeding of the five thousand. Scholars believe that Matthew was writing in a time of incredible division and oppression for the Jesus-following communities; these stories of mistaken understanding, violence, need, and Christ's power in those moments were written for these suffering communities.

- Have you had moments when you felt like Jesus invited you to walk on water, and you were able to join him? When have you felt like you were invited to do so, but felt like you were sinking?
- What do you think this story might mean to someone who is suffering? Who in your community—your church, your neighborhood—has something in common with the hurting communities of Matthew's time?
- What is your understanding of miracles like this? Do you look for material or psychological explanations, or do you take the story as we hear it here?

Published by the Office of Formation of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. © 2017 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.