

Sunday 16 August 2020 - Leura

Stephen White (331)

Was it a coincidence?

Gathering of the People of God

As we come to our time of worship you may like to prepare a space where you can be peaceful and focus on being accompanied into the holy presence of God.

You might like to light a candle. Be comfortable and warm wherever you are sitting.

I have included a YouTube links for the hymns. If you want to listen to the hymns or sing along with music, click on the link, or copy and paste it in your internet page.

Remember you are not alone. You are in God's presence and have those whom you love and are loved by in your heart.

While we are not coming together in the church for worship, we are still together in spirit as we participate in our Worship Service at home. So we are in a sense gathering together in spirit.

I will not conduct this whole Service at Zoom church but cover some parts of the message and we will have time for discussion.

Call to Worship

How good and pleasant it is when those who worship God desire to live in unity and peace. It is like the pleasure experienced on seeing rainfall transform arid outback plains into carpets of colourful wildflowers.

In these ways, God's blessings are truly visible.

[Lectionary Generated Liturgy]

Prayer of Adoration

God of all creation, your beauty and your blessings are visible not only in our wide, sweeping plains, and unique land forms, but also wherever people gather to worship you.

We gather here in this time and this place – it may be at home reading this Service or at Zoom church – we come, grateful for all your blessings towards us.

We praise you for linking our lives with yours through the gift of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. In and through him we have been blessed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring your dreams of a just and peaceful world to reality. A world, where the barriers which separate people from you and from one another, are peacefully and willingly broken down forever.

This we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen

[Lectionary Generated Liturgy]

Song TIS 188 Where wide sky rolls down and touches red sand

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFX7VBH_2ZQ

1 Where wide sky rolls down and touches red sand,
where sun turns to gold the grass of the land,
let spinifex, mulga and waterhole tell their joy
in the One who made everything well.

2 Where rain-forest calm meets reef, tide and storm,
where green things grow lush and oceans are warm,
let every sea-creature and tropical bird
exult in the light of the life-giving Word.

3 Where red gum and creek cross hillside and plain,
where cool tree-ferns rise to welcome the rain,
let bushland, farm, mountain-top, all of their days
delight in the Spirit who formed them for praise.

4 Now, people of faith,
 come gather around with songs to be shared, for blessings abound!
 Australians, whatever your culture or race,
 come, lift up your hearts to the Giver of grace.

Elizabeth J. Smith 1956 -
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Prayer of Confession

Too Busy

Father, forgive us that we fill our minds with many things that cause us hurt and confusion
 instead of focusing our attention on Christ.

We confess that we make space in our lives for the things we want to do,
 and then we pretend we are too busy to serve you.

We confess that we are quick to criticise others
 and to judge them for the very same things of which we ourselves are guilty.

Forgive us our lack of sympathy,
 our failure to show mercy and our neglect of compassion.

Forgive us for being pleased when other people make mistakes
 and their failures are known by everyone.

Forgive us our lack of sensitivity and understanding of each other's needs and fears.

Forgive us where we are unforgiving, and make us new and clean again.

Through Christ our Lord. .

Amen!

[500 Prayers for all occasions, p167, No. 265]

Assurance of Forgiveness:

Family of God, God knows your need before you ask for help. There is enough mercy to cover
 all your sins, and not yours only, but those of the whole world. Therefore put the past and its
 errors behind you. Live as forgiven people, for in Christ, such you truly are!

Thanks be to God!

[Rev Bruce Prewer]

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

And also with you!

A Reading from Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph Makes Himself Known

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.^[a]

⁸ "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. ⁹ Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. ¹⁰ You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'

¹² "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly."

¹⁴ Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

(NIV)

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

A Reading from Matthew 15:1-28

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

²⁷ "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

(NIV)

This is the Gospel of our Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

Sermon

Was it a coincidence?

Life is full of coincidences. We meet people and find that they know people we know. We talk to someone about places we have been and we find that they too had been there.

We talk about being in the right place at the right time, or maybe being in the wrong place!

When we look back in our lives, we see how our lives have taken certain directions, that we may not have been aware of at the time or would have chosen had we been conscious of where we were heading.

I don't remember dreams, but sometimes I come into a situation and it feels like I have been there before. Some of you have dreams and you can remember them vividly.

I can look back and see how God has put me in certain places at certain times. We have been somewhere or done something that has prepared us for a situation that we will experience in a later time.

In 1972 I started studying Mechanical Engineering. In my course I studied full time in the Autumn Semester, that is the first half of the year and did industrial experience in the Spring Semester. I wrote lots of letters applying for jobs in engineering and got a job as a junior storeman at the Leyland Australia car plant in Zetland. At Christmas time I finished up and went on holidays. In January I went for an interview for a cadetship in Mechanical Engineering with the Public Transport Commission. I was accepted and commenced in February 1973, and worked for the government railways for nearly 41 years. After accepting the cadetship, I heard that Leyland was going to offer me a cadetship.

Now, I would have preferred working on cars to trains, but I had already accepted the job in the railways. It was only a couple of years later that Leyland closed down their plant and stopped making cars in Australia. I believe that God was leading me in the direction of my career.

Genesis readings

If you have been following the lectionary readings in Genesis we have been following the stories of Abraham & Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Esau, Jacob and his wives Rachel and Leah, and his twelve sons. Throughout these stories, we find people being in the right place at the right time. When Abraham's servant went to Nahor to find a wife for Isaac, it was Rebekah, Abraham's grand niece who met the servant and offered him water at the well. There are many other "coincidences" in the Bible stories.

Today we come to a small part of the story of Joseph, a story that fills the last fourteen chapters of Genesis.

Let us start at the beginning of this story of Joseph.

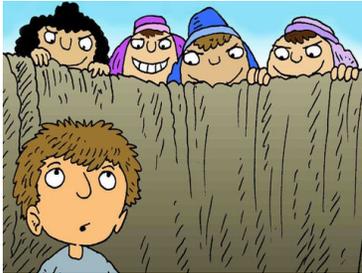
Joseph was the first born of Isaac's favourite wife, Rachel and as such he was Jacob's favourite son. Jacob did not hide this but treated Joseph with special treatment, such as giving him the coat of many colours.

The result of this is that his brothers were jealous and hated him.



Joseph, the dreamer had a series of dreams about his family bowing down to him and he shared these with his brothers and father. How ridiculous are these dreams? None of them would bow down to this boy. His brothers had no time for the "dreamer" and even his father was annoyed with these dreams.

The brothers were out in the country with the sheep and Jacob sent Joseph to go and see how they were going. So off went Joseph in his special coat. They could see him from a long way off and they started plotting what they could do to him. They stripped him of his coat and put him in a pit. Some of them wanted to kill him.



By coincidence along came a caravan of merchants, and the brothers sold Joseph as a slave. In Egypt Joseph was bought by Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. He worked well and was put in charge of the household. We are told that "God was with him!"

But Potiphar's wife fancied Joseph and tried to seduce him, but Joseph refused her advances. She then said that Joseph had attacked her and Joseph was put in prison.

He impressed the guards and was put in charge of the other prisoners. One night two prisoners had dreams that they did not understand, and Joseph explained what they meant, and it all came to be as he had predicted.

Joseph had been through some horrendous situations and he was not happy with all the bad luck he had experienced. When he explained the good news of his dream to the cup bearer, he said:

"But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."
Genesis 40:14-15 NIV

Joseph becomes the Prime Minister

Sometime later Pharaoh had troubling dreams and no-one in Egypt could tell him what the dreams meant. The cupbearer remembered Joseph, and Joseph was called to explain what they meant. Egypt will have seven years with very good harvests followed by seven years of drought.

Joseph is put in charge of collecting all the grain and produce in the good years so they could survive the drought years.

Joseph became the most important person in Egypt, behind Pharaoh.

The very severe drought in that part of the world affected Egypt and all the surrounding countries, including Canaan where Jacob and his family lived. They heard that there was food in Egypt so Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain. He would not let his youngest son Benjamin go with them. Jacob had not got over the loss of Joseph eighteen years earlier.

Joseph's brothers turn up in Egypt to buy grain. They are quizzed through an interpreter by this important Prime Minister. Joseph gets them to tell him all about the family, including about one son being dead and the youngest back home with his father.

I am sure that at first there are all sorts of conflicting memories Joseph was experiencing: joy at finding his family and then bitterness at what his brothers had done to him.

Joseph toys with his brothers, setting them up so that they appear guilty of theft, and then demands that one of them, Simeon, be held hostage while the rest go home to collect Benjamin, Joseph's full brother, and bring him to Egypt.

Jacob is reluctant to let Benjamin go, fearing he will lose another son. They were running out of grain and must purchase more if they were to survive. In the end Jacob agreed to let Benjamin go with his brothers.

When the brothers return to Egypt they are invited to dine with Joseph.

However, Joseph sets Benjamin up as a thief and orders him to remain in Egypt as a slave.

Judah pleads with Joseph that Benjamin must return home for the sake of their father's well-being and offers himself as a replacement.

I am sure that Joseph was bitter with his brothers, and some of his actions were aimed at punishing them. But at some stage, probably after they had gone home, that he started to realise that God was at work in his life.

Quoting Rev Bruce Prewer:

God did not dramatically rescue Joseph from the deep pit into which he had been tossed, he did not send angels to rescue him from the slave traders, and he did not miraculously rescue him from the Egyptian guards when he was falsely imprisoned. But that does not mean that God had forgotten the young mistreated Jew.

The story of Joseph reaches its climax there in Egypt. By his integrity, his faith, and a series of providential events, Joseph the teenage slave languishing in prison, went on to become a successful man and hold the high position of Prime Minister; no one above him except the mighty Pharaoh. Joseph's key responsibility was the management of the food supply of the nation during the seven years of famine that followed the seven years of bumper harvests.

Joseph realises that the dreams he had as a boy were coming true. God had given him a vision of what was to happen and he now realised that God has been with him all the way.

Throughout the story, we read that people had recognised that "the Lord was with him".

The brothers are feeling that God is punishing them for selling Joseph into slavery, so many years before. I am sure that every time they saw their father's sadness at losing Joseph, they really felt this guilt.

At last Joseph sends away his servants, and being alone with his brothers he tells them who he is. They are immediately scared for their lives expecting Joseph to punish them.

But Joseph said to them:



"Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ...

God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

So then it was not you who sent me here, but God."

Genesis 45: 5, 7.9 NIV

As you look back in your lives, can you see God's hand guiding you? Have you had dreams that have come true?

Some people believe in predestination, that God has everything all worked out and has determined what will happen in our lives. But God is not a puppeteer, pulling the strings in every detail of our lives.

God did not make Joseph's brothers sell him to the Egyptian traders. God did not send him to prison. God does not cause bad things to happen in our lives or cause people to suffer.

God does have a plan for our lives, he wants us to love and serve him every moment, but we are permitted to make our own decisions and lead our lives as we choose.

In spite of this, God is still with us, following us in every aspect of our lives.

When something horrible happens many people will say: "How can God let this happen?"

I am sure that when we cry over the pain and suffering of people we know and love, and also people around the world suffering from Coronavirus, starvation, persecution, war, and the explosion in Beirut, God is indeed beside us weeping with us and sharing our pain.



Jesus and the Canaanite Woman

In our Gospel story we have the most unusual story where Jesus turns away a distressed mother with a sick child.

But the story seems to be totally out of character for Jesus. Why does he just ignore her and her cries for help? Did she just catch Jesus on an off day with his compassion down?

He had come away to this Gentile territory to recharge his batteries. He is probably worn out and emotionally exhausted. Shortly before this he heard about the death of his cousin John the Baptist.

We are so used to Jesus ministering confidently to the crowd, that perhaps, we fail to notice those times when he struggles to discern God's way and someone from the crowd ministers to him.

Jesus could not go anywhere in Israel without crowds following him. So he went off into Gentile country to be alone with His disciples for a little while. He wanted to teach them much and could not do this with all the crowds around.

But even in this foreign area, he is recognised by this Gentile woman.

Quoting from William Barclay:

--- At first Jesus seemed to pay no attention to her. The disciples were embarrassed. "Give her what she wants," they said, "and be rid of her." The reaction of the disciples was not really compassion at all; it was the reverse; to them the woman was a nuisance, and all they wanted was to be rid of her as quickly as possible.

Jesus had to begin with the Jews; and here was a Gentile crying for mercy. There was only one thing for Jesus to do; he must awaken true faith in the heart of the woman.

Instead of taking offence at the way Jesus identifies her with the dogs, the woman redirects his question by arguing theologically that both Gentiles (dogs) and Jews (children) are subject to God's authority. Then Jesus responds to her faith and heals the woman's daughter.

Perhaps, we see here God leading Jesus to consider where he is going with his ministry. Up till now he ministered mainly to the Jews. When he sent his disciples out, he told them to only go to the Jews.

Maybe God has put this woman here to minister to Jesus as much as Jesus was able to minister to her and heal her daughter.

We often just assume that Jesus was so close to God that he knew where he was going all the time. But Jesus, the Son of God, was also a human being and as such still had to work some things out for himself as he went along, to see where God was leading him as God leads us day by day.

We all experience the leading of God in our lives. He prepares us and uses us to minister to others, and sometimes we may not be aware of what is happening.

Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit to head us in our daily lives. Let us open our eyes and hearts to see the Spirit working in our lives and the lives of those around us.

Let us remember the words of Joseph:

"Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ...

God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

So then it was not you who sent me here, but God."

Amen.

Questions to consider:

1. Do you have dreams? Have you seen these come true?
2. Can you see where God has led you throughout your life?
3. Where is God leading you now?
4. How is God using us through this difficult time of the Coronavirus?

Song - TIS 593 Lord take my hand

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tp0z1TyD9Dc>

1 Lord, take my hand and lead me
along life's way;
protect and guide and feed me
from day to day.
Without your care and favour
I go astray;
so take my hand, O Saviour,
and lead the way.

3 For when it seems you're hiding
your saving might,
still you are safely guiding
me through the night.
So take my hand and lead me
along life's way;
protect and guide and feed me
to endless day.

2 Lord, take my heart and hide it
within your grace;
through pain and pleasure guide it
to be at peace.
Hold close your child, dear Saviour,
and stay with me,
and help me trust whenever
I cannot see.

Julie Hausmann 1825-1901
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Notices: Remember to check our latest church bulletin and tune in to Zoom church.

Offering

While we can't place our offerings in the offering bags, you are reminded that you can made your offering by Giving Direct, direct debit (see bank details in the Bulletin) or putting money aside for when we can physically meet together.

Offering Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we offer these gifts and our lives as signs that our faith is expressed not in words alone, but in deeds - deeds performed in the name and for the sake of Jesus, our Lord and our Saviour.

Amen

[Lectionary Generated Liturgy]

Prayers of the People

Linda Peterson

There is a response in the prayer:
When I say: Lord have mercy,
Please respond: ***How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!***

God you are the one who calls us to your mercy.
You invite us to listen and understand your words.
You are a God who holds us in love and belonging.
Lord have mercy.

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

God, we come to you as people longing....
Longing for peace
Longing for justice
Longing for rest
In the deep still of our hearts, speak to us we pray.
Lord have mercy.

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

God we face many uncertainties and change in these days.
 We ask that you carry us on your steadfast path of peace and trust.
 We pray that these times would deepen our seeking and asking of your spirit

God there are many in this world who are suffering and in despair.
 We are mindful of those who face loss, sickness, despair, trauma, fear and lack.
 We pray that people in all places would find what they need to be safe and nourished.
 We pray that those of us who have will be generous in care and in sharing whatever we have.
 Lord have mercy.

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

God, we pray for governments of all places and nations
 May leaders govern with wisdom, mercy and care.
 May people and your creation be the main concern as leaders navigate these changed times.

We remember our brothers and sisters in the middle east as they face the fallout of recent events.
 We also remember the great many people who are giving their lives in service to help, not just here but in many places throughout the world.
 May your spirit be seen on every street corner, in every generous hand, in every caring act.
 May you provide all that is needed and encourage us that have to give.
 Lord have mercy.

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

God we pray for our own places: Australia, the Blue Mountains, our little church community, our neighbour, our friends, those we know that are in need or suffering. Let your great care and holding be felt and known.
 Remind us that your spirit know no boundaries.
 Remind us that whilst doing everything we can to keep ourselves and others safe from Covid 19,
 To stay connected, to care, to reach out, to give, to stay close, to place our feet on the pathway of your peace.

Lord have mercy.
How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

Help us to find your good and gracious gifts in these distressing and challenging times.
 Lord have mercy.

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

In the name of our Lord Jesus,
Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Save us from the time of trial
 and deliver us from evil.

[Matthew 6:9-13](#)

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
 now and forever. Amen.

Song - TIS 681 Lord, Let me see

1 Lord let me see, see more and more,
 see the beauty of a person, not the colour of the skin,
 see the faces of the homeless with no-one to take them in,
 see discouragement because she'll never win:
 see the face of our Lord in the pain:
 Lord let me see

2 Lord let me hear, hear more and more,
 hear the sounds of great rejoicing, hear a person barely sigh;
 hear the ring of truth, and hollowness of those who live a lie;
 hear the wail of starving people who will die;
 hear the voice of our Lord in the cry:
 Lord let me hear

3 Lord let me care, care more and more,
 care for those who feel the loneliness, for those who have no say,
 care for friends who have no job and find it hard to face the day,
 care for those with whom we sing and work and pray:
 and in care Jesus Christ will be found:
 Lord let me care.

4 Lord let me learn, learn more and more,
 learn that what I know is just a speck of what there is to know;
 learn from listening to my neighbour when I'd rather speak and go;
 learn that as we live in faith and trust we grow;
 learn to see, hear and care, with our Lord:
 Lord let me learn.

5 Lord let me love, love more and more,
 love the loveless and the fragile, help them be what they can be,
 love the way that I would like them to be looking after me;
 for to know you is to love them and be free,
 and in love Jesus Christ will be found:
 Lord let me love.

Ross Langmead 1949—
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Benediction

Now may our God, whom we know as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, fill us with all truth and peace
 that we may so live that others will experience the touch of grace.

May the Holy One of Israel lead our way, for the sake of Jesus Christ and the world.

Amen

[The Minister's Manual 2008]