

Sermon on Genesis 50:15-21 on the 4th S.a.Trinity 2017 in Shelly Beach

This world is a strange place for sure. And the Bible describes it very much as it is. Not much of a ideology pamphlet or party policy program there. Very different from the grand designs we get from the clever ideologues in these our latter days, who design life as if there is no God. The examples abound, but I'm not going down that way today even though the ANC policy conference closing last week, would give lots of material to consider.¹ No, the Bible doesn't speculate much, doesn't construe and imagine things, but rather describes the world as it is – fallen, sinful and very different to the triune God's original intent, vision and plan. The Bible shows how we lost paradise and lost track of what was good, right and salutary in God's sight on the way. No longer in harmony and synch with his creation, fellow creatures and fellow beings – children of and wonderfully made by one father. In this fallen world, families are disrupted – and not only in Syria and other places of civil war, brothers are at each others throat – and not only between different Muslim factions, brother rapes sister not only on the Cape Flats and even married couples – one complementary unit, brought together and united by God who created them man and wife - struggle to keep at peace and things working out. Just think of those ancient stories we learnt from our mothers and later from our teachers Cain killiing Abel, Jacob deceiving Esau, Amnon raping and discarding Tamar, Absalom's insurrection and rebellion against his father David. And that's just for starters and from the very first books of many in the Holy Bible.

Today's reading from Genesis focusses on Joseph and his brothers. A fascinating story and not only in the 4 volumes by Thomas Mann written over the course of some 16 years.² We're taken to the final parts of this epic drama. Jacob is dead. Joseph, the vice-regent in Egypt, 2nd in command, high and mighty and very much in power is left with his brothers, who are very much still like they were at the beginning: "*Dumm geboren und nichts dazu gelernt!*"³ Those men, who tried to sell him for a quick buck. Didn't hesitate to declare him dead and eaten by some fantastic beasts⁴, when it suited their whims. Perhaps it was just envy and jealousy, because their Father Jacob had taken just too much of an obvious fancy towards him – giving him the coat of many colours, that amazing technicoloured dreamcoat⁵ and given even some credence to those far-fetched dreams of his, stretching the brother's patience, goodwill and forbearance. Now they paid him back – backbiters, hypocrites and really quite evil – by drenching that super garment in goat's blood and fabricating some story of a dramatic killing out in the open veld. Meantime it was all just an all too common hijacking, kidnapping and primitive form of human trafficking. Brothers trying to get even and back at their Father, who was no novice to deceitful intrigue himself. For them selling off Joseph into slavery was good riddance and proving themselves right: Where was his superiority, lofty aloofness and elective dream works now? Dissolved into thin air. He was a slave. Afraid. Shit scared was probably

¹ These grand ideologues don't hesitate to walk over corpses – literally millions of them – to eradicate the evil, backward, offensive and just not up to standard amongst us, as they move brazenly forward to create the brave new world of socialism, facism, nationalism or whatever -ism they have come up with. The revolution eats its very own children, brother kills brother and children disown their parents and throw them to the dogs.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_and_His_Brothers

³ Roughly translated that means: "Born stupid and learnt nothing since!"

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantastic_Beasts_and_Where_to_Find_Them

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_and_the_Amazing_Technicolor_Dreamcoat

more like it. Robbed of his good wits, faith in humanity (sic!) and no longer the pet of his parents, but outcast, foreigner in a distant land and at the mercy of his despotic masters. The brothers however were free. Free of this half-brother of theirs, very much their own boss – powerful, right and in charge. The obvious proof of factuality and legitimacy of the *status quo*. So much for the prelude to our story.

Let's fast forward. Joseph's no longer slave. He's vice-regent in Egypt instead – just under Pharaoh. That's very close to God himself. Very much in control of things – not just in Egypt, but also in the surrounding countries like Palestine etc. Calling the shots, determining the destinies of many, many people with a stroke of a pen, with a wink of an eyebrow or a hasty judgement passed. The brothers however are in dire straits. The far-reaching famine has forced them to look for food elsewhere and way beyond their borders. They're no longer masters of their own destiny, never mind that of their brothers. They're pretty much at the bottom of the ladder of those coming to plead for mercy at pharaohs granaries. A huge change by God's will and steering. Standing before Joseph, they're now the ones very much scared and shaking in their pants, afraid of revenge. They know, they deserve payback. They're dependant on Joseph's favour and grace. He's got the keys to the storage tanks. He's the manager. He's in control.

Still, they think, they can manage their own insurance and security. Resorting again to fibs, lies and speculative reasoning, they send out tweets of fake news, fabrications of their own feeble mind. Everyone can see, what they're up to, but they forge ahead with their trumped up machinations: *Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father.* They don't tell that to his face. No, they're too chicken for that. They send a go-between and pretend to be in charge, sending and ordering and calling the shots. Meantime, they're just desperate for a way out and suing for some sort of truce. They know, forgiveness is the only way out. It was sin, hurting their little brother so cruelly in those earlier days. It was evil trespassing of God's most holy will to sell one of their very own into slavery and to not rejoice in his blessings and achievements and divine insights and heavenly revelations. Rather they envied him, put him down were possible and discarded him at the first chance as if he was nothing at all, not a human being, but an animal, not their brother, but some alien. They really did not loose much love on him – coveting his gifts, his position and selling him off as if he was just a piece of merchandise and then proclaiming must self-righteously: It's nothing personal. It's just business as usual. "*Business se voel*" – it's sin's way, godless and destructive!

Yes, Judas also betrayed Jesus solely for business – evil business – 30 pieces of silver. How many brothers today sell out their brother to save a salary in the budget, to gain the majority in the voting rights of the traditional firm and take over the coveted business once and for all? It's not just acting in ever-new TV series, but real life. We're serving other gods today – aren't we? God's called "Budget", "Survival of the Fittest" or the so-called "real-world" with it's fast and firm rules, laws and articles, we've come up with and we're so keen to obey as long they're not used against us. Never mind if they're not even close to God's holy will and law. Civil wars have always been the most brutal, cruel and vicious hostilities of all.

Here with Joseph the brothers try to add the voice of their Father and his command to their bargain. It's a cheap shot really, doesn't carry much weight, the Father is dead and gone and even alive he couldn't have forced Joseph's hand. He's outgrown their small family sphere and their scheming patterns amongst spitefulness siblings. He's in big politics now.

Still, Joseph get's the hint. He's learnt a lot in his many years coming up through the ranks, in the slave barracks, in the prison cells, in the hellholes of Egypt. He knows, that he's not at his brother's or master's disposal, but rather belongs to the heavenly Father himself. He's his very own son, his dear child, the very pupil of his eye.⁶ Nothing can befall him, without this good Father's consent. And whatever does befall him, is surely going to serve him for good, yes, for his personal best – and that of many nations even. No doubt about that, because God himself leads his faithful through thick and thin, through deep waters and wide, open desert stretches – until we finally to get to the promised land by his faithful grace, mercy and endurance. He, who started the good work in us, he will surely do and complete, finish it. Therefore we are encouraged to confess with King David: *“Even though I go through death's dark vale, I fear no ill, for you are with me – o Lord and good Shepherd – your rod and staff comfort me!”*

Joseph knows full well, that he's not in control, but God. The triune God is to be loved, feared and trusted above all else – and none of us is God. Rather God wants us to be caring for each other, watching out for each other, being our brother's keeper as we and he and others struggle to get by. And as we do so, it is the true Father in heaven's merciful and compassionate will: *Forgive as your father has forgiven you!* Daily and more than 7x70 times. He has forgiven us all and every sin. Therefore, we too should gladly forgive those, who wrong us and trespass and sin against us. That is his way out of our human dilemma. “Forgiveness” is the only way to get out of this sinful mess, we have brought upon ourselves. There's no plea-bargain, no demands to be made, no deal to be struck, no compromise or easy way out – never mind cars to be set alight and other protests to be carried out. No, forgiveness, bearing each other's sinfulness and burdens is all there is that we can hope for. Forgiveness, the cancelling of debt, the gift of reconciliation and godly favour. God takes away our sins from us and takes them as his own. They are no longer counting against us, but weigh on him – IX. “Your sins are forgiven. Depart in peace +” Therefore, forgive as you have been forgiven.

It's what our true brother IX – the only begotten Son of this heavenly Father did for us there on the cross. He did not let our sins count against us, but rather he took them all on himself as his very own. He pleaded with the Father: “Forgive them!” He and his Father are one in this. Like this and even closer. There is no conflict of interest here. That's their one heart's concern: “Seeking and saving lost sinners through the forgiveness of sins!” That's what he implemented, finished and perfected on the cross.

Likewise he teaches us to pray and make our way of life in his very own prayer: *“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those, who trespass against us!”* You, who have received much, give freely and abundantly too. There's no reason to be stingy or act miserly. God is rich and overflowing in

⁶ Zechariah 2:8; Psalm 17:8; Deuteronomy 32:10 etc.

mercy. Nobody is being short-changed. Everybody receives far more good than we have merited or are worthy of, because our father doesn't deal with us according to our credits or debits, but according to his great mercy, that is new every morning, has no end ever, but is rich, abundant and overflowing with divine goodness, flourishing and exuberance day in day out – come rain, sun or whatnot. Remember your brother was dead and is now alive! Remember all of this – heaven and earth is God's and all of that is yours too through IX. Nothing is amiss. All is yours. Taste and recognise, how friendly your God is. Rejoice and give glory and thanks to God from whom all blessings flow and who makes it rain over good and evil and his sun shine again and again.

People are tempted to take revenge – as if they're God. They think, they've got grudges to sort out and hurts to pay back. They actually believe, they are here on earth to eradicate the weeds and clean out the fields, make heaven on earth and society and institutions free from bad people – not just the roads from bad drivers, but society from barbarians and all nation from “rotten tomatoes” and “vermin”. Problem is, that they pull out the wrongs ones too. Throw out the good ones too. Blame the innocent, hurt them and make the righteous suffer with their false accusations and pharisaic attitude. They go overboard and hit harder, than is called for. They're not as fair, just and spot-on themselves. In the end these radicals and extreme priggish and self-appointed judges, who think they are God's mouthpiece, his elect magistrates and very own avengers, make things much worse than they were to start off with. Not satisfied to keep things going, they try to force our way back into paradise and we land up in hell (or very close to it!) – sooner or later.”

What do the brothers care, that Joseph cries and hollers as the slave drivers haul him away into exile and slavery? They've got pockets jingling with silver and their hardened hearts are void of love and compassion, their consciences are calloused and without feeling. Tough guys. Hard nuts to crack.

Joseph is not like that. He's learnt his lesson well. He knows like St.Paul to be high and low, prisoner and free, rich and poor, healthy and ill, well received and discarded, highly praised and roughly punished – it's all God's good and merciful will. Still, Joseph is assured in his heart and life: ***Even if these and those people – you as brothers, that deceitful wife of Potiphars and the forgetful chief butler – you all thought and did evil against me; yet God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive!*** That sounds very much like St. Paul's godly insight: ***And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*** (Rom 8:28 KJV) Just as he writes to St.Timothy: ***For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*** (1Ti 2:3-4 KJV)

Look on the cross. It was not so different. The rowdy crowd was screaming for blood: Crucify, crucify! Yet Jesus prays: “Father forgive them!” And he did. Your sins are forgiven. Depart in peace +

See, that is God's good and favourable will! Therefore don't be afraid. Take heart. Now and always! Amen.