

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

^{37:1} Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. ² This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

^{37:12} Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." ¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. He came to Shechem, ¹⁵ and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" ¹⁶ "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." ¹⁷ The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. ¹⁸ They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him" – that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. ²⁸ When some

Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Commentary

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob and first-born of his favorite wife, Rachel. Joseph was Jacob's favorite child: his father made him a coat with long sleeves (or a "coat of many colors"). His father's favoritism, Joseph's tendency to tattle on his brothers, as well as his proclivity to dreaming grandiose dreams: all of these factors turned his older brothers against Joseph. Matters between the brothers come to a head when Joseph comes searching for them in the fields, and his brothers are inspired to seize him, and to drop him into a dry well. Circumstances send a caravan of traveling traders their way, and instead of letting Joseph perish in the pit, the brothers decide to sell him into slavery. Thus his blood would not be on their hands – and they would make a profit, besides.

Reflection

Favoritism and jealousy are powerful and destructive forces. Have you ever experienced them in your life? If favoritism and mistrust caused a rupture within your family, how was healing achieved, and can you see God's hand in the process of reconciliation?

Romans 10:5-15

^{10:5} Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them."⁶ But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down)⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);⁹ because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.¹¹ The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.¹³ For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Commentary

One of the central themes of Paul's Letter to the Romans is the contrast between the Law – that is, the teachings of Moses in the first five books of the Bible – and the Gospel – the Good News revealed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this passage from

Romans, Paul contrasts the righteousness that comes from DOING (obeying all of the commandments of the Law) and that which proceeds from BELIEVING ("For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved." – v. 10). Paul emphasizes the importance of learning the Good News through hearing, or proclamation. We, today, might call "proclamation" evangelism, or preaching, or faith-sharing. The Gospel is voice-activated: all it takes to plant a seed of faith in someone's heart is a word spoken at the right time.

Reflection

What does it mean for Paul to ask, "And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?" – v. 14. Do you feel that being a Christian obligates us to share our faith with others? If so, how do YOU do that?

Matthew 14:22-33

^{14:22} Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ²⁸ Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Commentary

Last week's story of the feeding of the five thousand began with, "Jesus withdrew from there." (Matt. 14:13). Today's reading likewise begins with Jesus going off to pray, then reports him walking to his disciples on the water. Jesus overcame physical hunger by multiplying the loaves and the fish; now he overcomes the forces of nature by mastering the sea. Water was a symbol of chaos in the Jewish tradition: it was dangerous and frightening and uncontrollable. This was a powerful story for Matthew and his readers, for in the darkest part of the night, the frightened disciples in their little boat see Jesus walking on the sea to their aid. Peter – representing the other 12 disciples – wanted to meet his Lord and Master on the waters, but his faith wavered before the storm and wind. At his cry for rescue, Jesus reaches out his hand and pulls Peter up, loving and saving him despite what Jesus calls his "little faith."

Reflection

Storms will surely come in our lives, and in the life of the church. Where have you known conflict, where have you experienced smooth waters, and how did Jesus bring you through the stormiest of times?

Responsive Psalter

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

^{105:1} O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.

² Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.

³ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴ Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually.

⁵ Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,

⁶ O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

^{105:16} When he summoned famine against the land, and broke every staff of bread,

¹⁷ he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

¹⁸ His feet were hurt with fetters, his neck was put in a collar of iron;

¹⁹ until what he had said came to pass, the word of the LORD kept testing him.

²⁰ The king sent and released him; the ruler of the peoples set him free.

²¹ He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions,

²² to instruct his officials at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom.

^{45b} Praise the LORD!

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.