

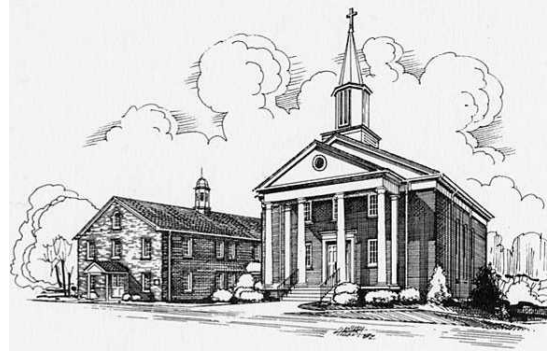
The Lessons Appointed for Use

on

Proper 14

Year A

RCL



Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Psalm 85:8-13

Matthew 14:22-33

The Collect

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and

ever. *Amen.*

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. 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. 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. 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.

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 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." 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, and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?"

"I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock."

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. They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. 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.” But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” 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. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore;

and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

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. Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 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. 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.

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

Confitemini Domino

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD and call upon his Name;
*
make known his deeds among the peoples.
- 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him, *
and speak of all his marvelous works.
- 3 Glory in his holy Name; *
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
- 4 Search for the LORD and his strength; *
continually seek his face.
- 5 Remember the marvels he has done, *
his wonders and the judgments of his mouth,
- 6 O offspring of Abraham his servant, *
O children of Jacob his chosen.
- 16 Then he called for a famine in the land *
and destroyed the supply of bread.
- 17 He sent a man before them, *
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

18 They bruised his feet in fetters; *
his neck they put in an iron collar.
19 Until his prediction came to pass, *
the word of the LORD tested him.
20 The king sent and released him; *
the ruler of the peoples set him free.
21 He set him as a master over his household,
as a ruler over all his possessions,
22 To instruct his princes according to his will
and to teach his elders wisdom.
45 Hallelujah!

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

SERMON

I've been talking for the last few Sundays of the challenges of living a Christian life in a world ruled by sin. Thinking about that for this week's sermon, I was reminded of something that happened at the Chapel of St. Arbuck's some time ago. The Archbishop decided that it was time for a good wash and brush up. The interior got new carpet, the exterior got new paint, wood that had been suffering from the ravages of the weather was replaced and I have to say, it turned out well. The Chapel just gleams.

Truthfully, before the gleaming could begin, there was a mighty rough spot that had to be gotten over. The Archbishop had put the Sexton in charge

of the renovation, instructing him to hire the workers, and he came back with the least inspiring collection of humanity I ever saw short of a jail cell. One was immensely obese and could hardly move. One was missing an arm. Another looked as if he'd been sleeping rough for months. He actually still had a vine caught in his beard when he showed up the first day. Another was full of attitude. Another seemed to be full of something else. As you can imagine, the Archbishop was beside himself to see this rag-tag bunch show up to renovate his church. He had imagined a crew in uniforms arriving in a shiny truck, someone who looked the part of people chosen to renovate God's house. I happened to be passing by His Excellency's office as he was

telling the Sexton off.

“Why do you doubt?” the Sexton asked. “I have chosen these workers as being best suited to the job. If they need help, if they fall short, I will be there to assist.”

There followed more, pointed, expressions of the Archbishop’s opinion of the Sexton’s judgment, but, as we all know, the Archbishop is a silly man, and no one pays much attention to him, least of all the Sexton. It wasn’t long before the Archbishop was called away, and by the time he returned, he’d forgotten all about the Sexton’s unsatisfactory work crew.

You don’t have to ride around the sun very many times before you begin to notice that the world

contains an awful lot of unlikely people; people who don't seem to share your idea of what it takes to make it in the world. This one is addicted, that one is a drunk, this one is just dumb, that one so full of hate that it is painful to speak with him.

What are these unlikely-looking people doing in my nice, tidy world? A lot of people you meet, it seems, look an awful lot like the crew the Sexton brought in, or even a lot like Joseph's brothers in the text today.

Joseph's family was a big one. Jacob, their father, fell in love with Rachel. He worked seven years for her father to win permission to marry her, but on the wedding night, her father substituted her sister Leah for Rachel and when Jacob awoke he was

married to the wrong sister. He had to promise another seven years' labor for Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel but didn't care at all for Leah, and she was heart-broken.

When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

If that doesn't break your heart, I don't know what will.

There are two other women in the story, Bilhah, Rachel's maid, and Zilpah, Leah's maid. Here's where things get REALLY unreasonable, because Jacob starts having children with the maids as well.

Finally, we're told:

Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace."

Rachel's son was Joseph. Joseph the best-loved. Joseph of the coat of many colors, or long sleeves, take your pick. When we pick up the story, Joseph, who had already spoken of a dream in which all his brothers were bowing down to him, is working as a helper to his half-brothers, who are the children of the two maids.

"Helper" my foot! Joseph the best-loved, jumped up in a fancy coat, is being sent to spy on his half-brothers, and they know it. That's where the trouble started. The brothers knew that Joseph was spy-

ing on them and they were mad – almost mad enough to kill. It’s all well and good to say that these were ancient people in an ancient time, but the ties of blood are the strongest we know. How did these boys, for boys they were, come to a place where they would really plan to kill their own brother?

“Here comes this dreamer. 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.”

Not only kill their brother, but cover it up by lying to their father. Think of his pain! How do you come to such a place?

Let’s not forget that these boys are all Jacob’s

sons, and Jacob has been given a new name: Israel. These are the children of Israel, the forefathers of the twelve tribes, God's chosen people. This bunch God has chosen don't look to me much better, and in many ways they look much worse, than the work crew the Sexton came up with.

Meanwhile, back at the chapel, I watched the Sexton with his unlikely workers very closely. I was particularly struck by the way he matched the jobs he assigned to the limitations and skills of the worker. The Sexton placed each worker carefully, and the busiest of all was the Sexton himself. He was everywhere, lending a hand here, making a suggestion there. He wasn't so much supervising as he was bringing out the best in each workman. As a

consequence, the work moved ahead smoothly and well. How many times have we all seen mug shots or street people or alcoholics or addicted people and thought that they couldn't possibly be in God's plan? They must be children of the devil. Certainly they have nothing to do with my tidy world. The Sexton recognizes that the job must be done with the workers available. To one he said, "You must use a kicker to stretch the carpet before you nail it down", and showed him how to use the carpet kicker. To another, who had thinned the paint so much that it didn't cover well, he advised, "Re-paint, and thin no more."

(Sorry! I just always wanted to do that)

Jacob's sons could learn a lot from the Sexton.

And yet, because of their jealousy and rage Joseph was sent off to Egypt. But, remember, from Egypt, Joseph will save the whole family from starvation. The consequences of our actions are visible in fullness only by God.

In a nutshell, that's a lesson for the whole passage. God's will, God's plans, will be accomplished, even if he has to work with a bunch of pretty unlikely-looking people. God's plan will work itself out even through hatred, and murderous urges, and self-righteous indignation.

In the end, as I said, the Chapel sparkled. The carpet was firmly stretched, the paint gleamed, the woodwork flawlessly polished. There was even a new sense of pride and accomplishment in the eyes

of the unlikely-looking workers who, by trusting in the Sexton's assurance that even if they failed, he would sustain them, now felt that they could walk on water. The Sexton's faith in them showed them they could overcome their limitations. They grew, becoming more than they had been. Living as a Christian in a world ruled by sin is just like the Sexton's approach to his unlikely work crew. At the end of the job, they became more than they were at the start.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

I love you to pieces, but you're no better than you should be. I'm certainly not. If you were my confessors, we would be in the confessional a long time, indeed, for I have lived a life filled with shameful things. And yet, here I am where I was placed, unworthy though I am. And there you are, where you were placed. In the end, we are made more than we were in the beginning. That's something to be grateful for.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be
gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and
give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright 2020 J. Stewart Schneider