

## Trinity 10

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August 2020



gg62751291 www.gograph.com

### Readings:

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 there 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.

Matthew 14;22-33

Immediately he 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 towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, 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 towards 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 worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

### **Reflection**

This week we have another miracle – walking on the water. This miracle is perhaps the most parodied and satirised event from the Bible and I have to confess that when first approaching it, I had to ask myself what the point of it was. It seemed a spectacular piece of theatre, but what did it actually achieve? No one was fed, no one was healed and as only the disciples witnessed it, it did not initially enhance Jesus' reputation or advance his ministry. It seemed a random, maverick, event, just an opportunity for Jesus to display his power but for no great purpose and for no one else's benefit – a temptation that Jesus had adamantly rejected in the wilderness. But we know that Jesus never did anything for self-gratification, and all he did was meaningful and to some greater end, so we need to dig deeper to discover his motive and what this miracle actually achieved. And once again, in order to shed light on this miracle, I am going to use John Pritchard's event formula – what happened; what it means; what it means for us now.

### **What happened**

Again - my perennial issue with the lectionary compilation – the Gospel reading begins very abruptly and without explanation. The first word, "immediately," implies that what now happens is Jesus' urgent response to something that has gone before but we need to go back to previous verses to find out what that was. And in this case, it does follow on directly from last week's reading about the feeding of the 5,000. That long day of healing, preaching and feeding must have drained Jesus completely. But rather than set sail with the disciples, he sends them off without him and then, no doubt gently, dismisses the crowd and goes higher up the mountain to be alone and pray and find that spiritual refreshment he needs after that gruelling day. Imagine what a doctor or nurse must feel like after a long shift in an

ICU and you begin to get some idea; we know from other stories that the miraculous healings that Jesus did drained him of some internal force which needed to be restored before he could go on. After this time of reflection, he felt strong enough to rejoin his companions but they are already well on the way to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Or at least they should be, but the weather has turned against them, the boat is being tossed around and for most of that night, they are in fear of their lives. Until, in the early morning mist they see a figure walking towards them – walking! – but they are in the middle of a lake. It is not possible, not unless it is a ghost. But this is no ghost but Jesus himself coming towards them. Peter rashly tries to join him but reality dawns and he starts to sink and has to be hauled out and taken back to the boat by Jesus. And when they arrive the overawed disciples can only wonder and worship.

### **What it means**

This was, as I said, a display of power; evidence that Jesus is indeed Lord of Creation and can control the elements even if there may be few occasions when he chooses to do so as directly as this. He chooses to walk across a lake in a storm, perhaps because it is simply the quickest way to get to the disciples. He knows they will be panicking and afraid of drowning but that his presence will calm and reassure them which it does once they realise who he is. And the by product is that they are given further evidence of his divinity. Bit by bit, with each sermon and each miracle, he is building up their faith. As we learned two weeks ago, we do not receive our faith fully grown but each experience of Jesus expands and strengthens it. It needs to be incremental. We don't expect a child to absorb the whole of life's wisdom in its first year. No more can we expect to be mature Christians on a short acquaintance with Jesus. We would not be able to cope with such overwhelming knowledge in one go. Getting to know Jesus is a lifelong commitment. Sometimes we get ahead of ourselves as Peter does here. He thinks he's got this faith thing sorted – and perhaps there was also an element of showing off to the others just how great his faith was. But it backfires leaving him in a desperate situation, when he realises the enormity of what he has undertaken. Though Jesus rebukes him, he still holds out his hand and brings Peter to safety.

### **What it means for us now**

Do you know the children's song that goes?

*My God is so big, so strong and so mighty,  
There's nothing that he cannot do.*

We might sing it, but do we really believe it? We make our God so small; we judge him by human standards and think of his power in terms of earthly rulers and governors. But as Jesus demonstrates here, it is so much more than that. There really is nothing that he cannot do if he chooses to do it. We might, perhaps, wonder why he does not choose to act more often, to intervene more in human life, but he is intervening all the time but through his agents – us. As Teresa of Avila said: "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours." As his agents we can act in his name and "borrow" his power; we can metaphorically step out onto the water in faith. Like Peter, we may suddenly realise how much we have taken on and become daunted, and realise our faith is not up to the task. But Jesus will never leave us floundering; he will reach out his hand and he will help us reach a successful outcome. We, the Church, are the Body of Christ. All power was given to him (Matthew 28:18) and he has bequeathed that power to us through the Holy Spirit. Using that power to serve him, to help to accomplish his kingdom is our great privilege; and it is also, as it says in the Eucharistic prayer, "our duty and our joy." Amen

## **Prayers**

### **Today's Collect**

Let your merciful ears, O Lord,  
be open to the prayers of your humble servants;  
and that they may obtain their petitions  
make them to ask such things as shall please you;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen

### **For Creation**

Creator God of Love, thank you for the gift of life  
which we share with all creation.  
We commit ourselves to be good stewards  
now and always.  
Call us again to safeguard everything you have made  
for the earth and all its fullness is yours.  
Amen

### **Prayers for those suffering financially during the Pandemic**

We pray, Lord, for all those who have been impoverished by this crisis.  
For those whose businesses have failed.  
For those who have lost jobs and income.  
For those struggling with mortgages and debt.  
For those who are finding it hard to put food on the table for their children.  
And we pray for those charities who have lost income  
at this time when their help is most needed.  
Move the hearts of those who have much  
to help those who have so little.  
Amen.

### **Prayer for Beirut**

We pray for the people affected by this week's horrific explosion in Beirut, for the injured  
and the bereaved and those made homeless. We pray, too for medical staff and relief  
workers and pray that you will be with them and bless their efforts.  
Amen

### **Blessing**

You are called and loved by God the Father  
And kept safe by Jesus Christ.  
Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.  
Amen