

Bible Study for 5th July 2020

Preparation

In our Bible Study this week we will be reading the following lectionary readings set for Sunday (5th July):

- **Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67**
- **Psalm 45:10-17**
- **Romans 7:15-25a**
- **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

There are a few reflections on page 2 (if you want to read these, please look after you've looked at the reading(s) yourself).

When exploring this week's readings you may wish to follow the pattern below:

Pray a simple prayer first. Perhaps you there's a line from a hymn that speaks to you of opening the scriptures. Or a simple "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25) is enough.

Then read one of the readings

PAUSE and reflect on that reading

- Was some new light shed on the passage for you?
- Who do you identify with most in the reading?

If anything particular strikes you, try returning to it and reflecting again on that part of the reading. You might also want to make some notes.

After your reflection, you may wish to move on to another reading. (You don't have to look at them all.)

When you have finished your reflections, pray the final prayer:

Final Prayer:

Jesus your burden is light, and though you were wounded by human beings and they treated you badly, still you showed that love conquers religious rules and offers us comfort. Help us to find you and the comfort of your love. **Amen.**



Reflection

The story in the Hebrew Scriptures continues this Sunday with the story of Rebekah and Isaac.

I am reminded, as I have been over recent weeks, how in these early days of human beings' relationships with God, they are living in a world so different from ours. There is really very little history for them to draw on for their behaviour. It reminds me of the responsibility and fear of being a parent for the first time, and suddenly holding a new born infant. Where was the rule book for this? It seems that the early fathers and mothers of Israel are discovering life as they live it and, at the same time, discovering God.

These are the days before the Bible or the faith could point to a rule book or rules like those which came from the time of exile when Moses brought the ten commandments down the mountain. To me, this story from Genesis, seems less about God and more about the love of Isaac for Rebekah. The story of how she was brought, willingly, to Isaac and how he loved her and was comforted by her after his mother's death.

The introduction of Rebekah to Isaac was definitely not how things happen today, there was no dating app, no expectation that they would date and if they got on well they would live together and then maybe get married. None of that existed at the time, these ground-breaking human beings were just discovering that love, in all its forms, is a gift from God.

Contrast that with people making a comparison between Jesus and John the Baptist. John, the ascetic prophetic voice in the wilderness. Was he possessed? Jesus the person who able to break out – and break others out of the rule bound lives of the time – friend of tax collectors and sinners – a glutton a wine bibber? Both these men were set in a religion that was judgemental and unyielding unlike simpler times of the old stories of Genesis.

Nevertheless the God of Genesis was the God of John and Jesus and is the God of today. Poor Paul, in the letter to the Romans, seems tormented by the humanness that Isaac and Rebekah seem to be so at ease with. It is hard, when there have been rules, to let them go and to live in grace. "Wretched man that I am" he says, and then he gives thanks to God through Jesus. It's almost like he leaves a step out, but we can see it, if we can see "between the words". Something changes between the end of verse 24 and the start of the next verse – Something which leads to praise and joy. It's all intertwined with the law too, but the law of Grace is more powerful than the law of death. The struggle to make sense of the body and the heart in Romans, is echoed in Jesus' reflection that the people want him to dance to their tune "weep when we weep" they say and "dance when we dance". They want Jesus to obey their rules, but Jesus is not willing. He wants to give the people an easy burden and to share a light yoke.

The icon at the beginning of the study sheets shows Jesus' arm around his friend's shoulder – a burden? A yoke? This burden is no burden, with Christ's arm around our shoulders, we are able to face the most difficult struggles and still find joy in our hearts, repeating the words of Romans 7:25 "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"