

Bible Study for 12th July 2020

Preparation

In our Bible Study this week we will be reading the following lectionary readings set for Sunday (12th July):

- **Genesis 25:19-34**
- **Psalm 119:105-112**
- **Romans 8:1-11**
- **Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

There's a reflection on page 2, but if you want to read it, please look *after* you've looked at the reading(s) yourself – otherwise it may change the way God sheds light on your unique perspective on these readings.

When exploring this week's readings try following this pattern:

Pray a simple prayer first. Perhaps you could just use the words, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105)

Read one of the readings

Pause

Reflect on the reading

Ask yourself

- What or who do you identify with most in the reading?
- Did God's word shed some new light on your path?

If anything particular struck you, try returning to it and reflecting again on that part of the reading.

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

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

Final Prayer:

Jesus, the seeds of your kingdom are growing in my heart, nourish them in the good soil of your steadfast love. You are my light, my lamp O God, dispel the shadows and bring me closer to you presence, day and night. **Amen.**

Reflection

The story of Isaac and Rebekah continues from last week with the birth of his twin sons and favouritism in the family.

As they grow up, Dad prefers Esau, the hunter, mum prefers Jacob, the quiet farmer. Isaac likes the meat that Esau brings home, Rebekah prefers Jacob's gentler more subtle ways.

This family is no perfect family, and I've seen a lot of families like that in my life. The unfairness of favouritism probably contributes to Jacob's desire to steal Esau's birthright. Jacob sees Esau's weak nature – Esau cannot be bothered to sort out his own food – and he demands Esau's inheritance in return for a bowl of stew. Esau's hunger is not for a blessing it is for a full stomach.

Perhaps, also, Esau relies on his father's favouritism and expects that he will overrule the deal the two brothers had made. That doesn't happen, not least because Jacob then, through deception, steals his father's blessing as well.

Where, then, is God in this story? Is it possible that this imperfect family could be chosen, by God, to bring the human family closer to grasping the nature of God?

That young man who has deceived and taken advantage of his family members (helped by his mum) eventually finds himself struggling with God for a blessing. And Jacob won't let go! He will not let go! Perhaps that was what he had been searching for all along – God's blessing, God's inheritance. At Peniel Jacob was willing to wrestle, to struggle, to be wounded because of this great desire for inheritance and blessing. "I will not go unless you bless me" he says to Almighty God, and he leaves the encounter blessed and limping. That's where this story is going. It's not a particularly pleasant story, it's a somewhat dysfunctional family, but it is real life.

Jacob recognises that he wants God to be in his family and, despite his all too human ways, he is determined to discover God's ways at Peniel. And the next day he is reconciled with his brother, Esau, his twin brother who had wanted to kill him.

What can I make of this story? The hope for me, is that even when I am going in the wrong direction, even a hint of going in the right direction – a movement in my spirit, is enough for God to speak into my life. I don't have to wait until I'm perfect, or my family is perfect, to experience God's desire to bless me, and my desire for God's blessing. It's like Jesus and Zacchaeus or the woman at the well, who both, despite their sense of imperfection and sinfulness (which is how others see them) are willing to come close to Jesus and be blessed by the experience.

This week I am challenged to come closer to God, to wrestle with God – not politely and well-manneredly, as if I come from a perfect family, but like Jacob. I come from a broken and fallen people. I am a human being like the next person, and sometimes my only guide is my thirst for God's blessing. A desire for God's light to shine in my life, for the lamp to light my steps, for the seed to fall in my soil. This is ultimately what really matters. I see it in the letter to Romans. "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:6). Don't let me ever give up your birthright with God for a bowl of stew! God's blessing and inheritance is worth so, so much more than that!