

Bible Study for 26th July 2020

Preparation

In our Bible Study this week we will be reading the following lectionary readings set for Sunday (26th July):

- **Genesis 29:15-28**
- **Psalm 128**
- **Romans 8:26-39**
- **Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

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

Pray a simple prayer first, perhaps simply reminding yourself that nothing in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:39)

Read one of the readings

Pause

Reflect on the reading

Ask yourself

- What am I willing to do for those I love?
- What might separate me from the love of God if it were not for Christ?
- How is the kingdom growing around me and within me?

If anything particular strikes you in the reading, 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:

God of our ancestors, covenant God reveal your kingdom to us in our lives today. Guide us to the scriptures as to living waters, and transform our lives like yeast in the dough. Show us pearls, and mustard seeds and treasure, in the fields of our hearts. **Amen.**

If you want to read a short reflection please see below or for a short YouTube reflection please go to [Introduction to Bible Study for Sunday 26th July](#)

Reflection

The Genesis reading continues the story of Jacob and tells how he stayed with Laban, having agreed to work for him for seven years in order to be married to Rachel. It tells how Laban tricked him into marrying his eldest daughter, Leah, first. It tells how Jacob then had to wait another 7 years before he married Rachel who then becomes Jacob's favourite.

There is so much wrong with this family! The grandfather of the twelve tribes of Israel creates strained relationships, uses deception and causes favouritism in the family. This family is never perfect. Far from it! In the UK today we do not countenance bigamy or trading in people, yet Jacob has two wives, and Rachel's father treats Rachel as a person to be traded.

The themes of strained relationships, deception, selling people and favouritism are repeated again and again in the story of this family who are, nevertheless, open to God. Perhaps it is because, despite their failures, they have qualities of persistence and, even though they have favourites, they do understand something of God's steadfast love, that they become the first human beings to form a covenant with God.

This family, at the beginning of a covenant relationship with God, are a covenant people and, as Jacob discovered in last week's reading, the covenant is about glimpsing heaven and going on a journey alongside a loving, trustworthy God.

In the Romans reading the covenant is seen to have been fulfilled in Jesus, for, says Paul, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God. Paul lists various things that might have been considered by his readers as separating them and God. Hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword... come on Paul! These things do, indeed, separate people from God, don't they? How many people cannot believe that God loves them when these things happen?

I have known churchgoers who think that God's favour is a consequence of their (good) behaviour – they ask, "Why should this bad thing happen to me when I've been good?" Jacob could have said – why am I deceived and why is life so hard for me? He could have given up. But, Jacob, Paul and ultimately Jesus, all come to know that God's love and God's covenant do not guarantee an easy life. Nor does the covenant result from good behaviour. Lots of people (like Job) have discovered that God allows difficult things to happen in their lives. God allows difficult things, but God does not make them happen, and God still loves.

Maria, in *Sound of Music*, sings, "Somewhere in my youth or childhood I must have done something Good" when Captain Von-Trapp falls for her... Not so simple Maria! The love of God cannot be overwhelmed by anything in these lists in Romans. Good behaviour is no guarantee that life will be easy or that people will not suffer. Good behaviour is not a guarantee of God's love. As Jacob shows, the guarantee of God's love, is God's very nature. Jacob's heart is open to God, and he discovers that, however he behaves, whatever he does, God desires to be close to him, to give him glimpses of heaven, and to love him on his journey, wherever it may lead. Jacob's knowledge of God's kingdom is like yeast which makes all the difference or a pearl of great price which is worth everything.