

## Ordinary VII 24 February 2019 ChCh-St. Luke's

### Readings:

Gen 45:3-11,15

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

Luke 6:27-38

### Reflection

*'Dear Lord,*

*So far today I am doing all right. I have not gossiped, lost my temper, been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or over-indulgent. However, I am going to get out of bed in a few minutes, and then, I will need all the help you can give! Amen.'*

What place does prayer have in your life? How is your prayer life right now? Full, rich and exciting? Dry, sporadic, desperate or leisurely? Verbose or silent? Prostrate and private or on the run? Mostly collective or individual? Do you come to God full to overflowing or do you empty yourself? Do you use special prayer helps like our NZ Prayer Book, candles and icons, scripture and imagination, a favourite devotional space, the great outdoors....or do arrow prayers in supermarket checkouts, hospital waiting rooms or traffic light queues work for you? I think my answer to the above bombardment of questions would have to be *"Yes! ....All of the above! And more!"*

Last Friday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, it was good to gather with a few Addington folk, light candles, hear each other's February 2011 stories and pray together, then later, to reunite with a friend visiting from Italy, sharing food, wine and loving memories. Prior to that – in another context - there were prayers of deep heartache, sharing someone's news of cancer diagnosis and then, within days, to hear the delight and witness tears of joy, awash with memories, of those celebrating the reopening of our beloved Town Hall. Prayer is expressed in many ways. In prayer, we open the depths of our being – body, mind and spirit

– to the Divine Presence. We commune with that which is more than our individual selves – the Great Compassion.

Today's readings bring my soul to its knees. How do they impact you?

Take our Hebrew scripture, the story of Joseph and his brothers, overflowing with raw emotion as the errant brothers reunite in Egypt and begin a journey of familial and personal reconciliation. A journey that first began with favouritism, jealousy, pride, sibling rivalry, treachery, greed and deceit (the stuff of Shakespearean plays, historic novels and TV soaps alike!); a journey that, in today's reading, reflects the guilt, fear, and dismay of Joseph's brothers alongside Joseph's forgiveness towards them, his faith and meaning-making as he reconciles the initial trauma of his victimisation and separation from family, with the positive outcomes now emerging – *“God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So ...it was not you who sent me here, but God”*

Is it a God-given gift? The ability to reconcile trauma or abuse with an eventual positive outcome? Does prayer help us turn from the darkness of envy, bitterness and resentment, to the light of acceptance, mercy and forgiveness?

What can we discern and learn from today's scriptures?

Joseph doesn't ask for explanations, doesn't deride or castigate his brothers. He calls them: *“Come closer to me”* he says. (It's harder to remain enemies at close quarters). *“I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt”* (Joseph – without an air of accusation - names what happened, what was done to him, but then he continues with words of reassurance and invitation). ... *“do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves”* Joseph describes what has happened from his perspective and invites a positive way forward: *“come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and*

*your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.*” And then, *‘he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them’* – What emotions were mixed in those tears? Sorrow, joy, a baptism of forgiveness, a cleansing of memories?

I recall receiving just such a moist, cleansing embrace many years ago, from a family friend whom I hadn't seen for far too long. Our lives had gone in different directions and I had lost touch. The circumstances were tragic. It took quite some courage (and prayer) on my part, to attend the funeral of the family's young adult son who had died of cancer. I was anxious about how I would be received, felt guilty and filled with sorrow as I joined the long line of well-wishers and comforters after the service. But when I was recognised from a distance, called by name and embraced with delight, love and tears, I experienced something of the great mercy and forgiveness that God offers us and I knew my anguished prayers had been heard and answered.

‘Be merciful...Do not judge... nor condemn. Forgive. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Give, expecting nothing in return. Do to others as you would have them do to you.’

Well, Lord – you are the miracle-worker! These exhortations bring both my body and soul to their knees. How are they possible to live out in daily life? Only through honest prayer - individual and collective - and an openness to keep growing in faith, to keep attending our soul gym, shedding those kilos of condemnation and judgement, improving our spiritual fitness, building muscles of compassion and love, agility in mercy and forgiveness.

For many years, the pinboard beside my desk held the following prayer – a Morning Resolve I'd first spotted years earlier above the desk of a fellow science technician:

*'I will try this day to live a simple, sincere and serene life, repelling promptly every thought of discontent, anxiety, discouragement, impurity, and self-seeking; cultivating cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity, and the habit of holy silence; exercising economy in expenditure, generosity in giving, carefulness in conversation, diligence in appointed service, fidelity to every trust, and a childlike faith in God.'*

That's one courageous and optimistic prayer! If I managed to focus on *one* aspect per *week*, I thought I was making at least some headway!

Another prayer I have come across more recently could be a helpful accompaniment throughout the upcoming Lenten season:

*O God:*

*Give me strength to live another day;*

*Let me not turn coward before its difficulties or prove recreant to its duties;*

*Let me not lose faith in other people;*

*Keep me sweet and sound of heart, in spite of ingratitude, treachery, or meanness;*

*Preserve me from minding little stings or giving them....*

In a nutshell - *'Do to others as you would have them do to you'* ....it certainly is a golden rule – purified in the furnace of life.

I invite you to pray with me, resting now in the abundant mercy and love of God as we listen to 'A Living Prayer'<sup>i</sup> and make it our own.....

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<sup>i</sup> CD: Alfie Boe, *You'll Never Walk Alone: The Collection*, Track 5