

## Ninth Sunday after Trinity

**Collect:** Almighty God, who sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your Church: open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace; 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.

**Genesis 37: 1–4, 12–28:** Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>12</sup> Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. <sup>13</sup>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.' <sup>14</sup>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, <sup>15</sup>and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, 'What are you seeking?' <sup>16</sup>'I am seeking my brothers,' he said; 'tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.' <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. <sup>19</sup>They said to one another, 'Here comes this dreamer. <sup>20</sup>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.' <sup>21</sup>But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, 'Let us not take his life.' <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; <sup>24</sup>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; 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. <sup>26</sup>Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup>but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup>And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. <sup>26</sup>But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup>But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' <sup>28</sup> Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' <sup>29</sup>He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. <sup>30</sup>But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' <sup>31</sup>Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' <sup>32</sup>When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup>And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

### **Reflection:**

Many of us will have listened to, been in the audience of or perhaps sung Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's musical Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat. There are many memorable tunes and some sparkling and amusing lyrics.

"Joseph" was written as a pop oratorio to be performed as a school production in 1968 and then an expanded version of the original opened as a musical in the West end 1973. Since then it has been performed professionally and as a school production including at our local schools.

Later the same writers would return to the Bible for another musical "Jesus Christ Superstar" and on Saturday in Regents Park a concert performance of this is due to begin a new run.

For "Joseph" the writers largely drew on the text from Genesis, about the youth of Joseph and his 11 brothers, through to his time in Egypt and the re-uniting with his brothers and his father Jacob. Women do not feature very much in either the bible narrative or the musical except for Potiphar's wife and her attempted seduction of Joseph. Culturally this is a story about a father and his sons, reminding us of the time in which it was set and the ongoing themes of land, male hierarchy and also the recognising of how God's love and mercy was being revealed to people.

The Old Testament text can seem distant and challenging and in the musical, two of the big numbers highlight the difficulties we can have in approaching the Old Testament. The cultural, social and economic situations within it are very different to our own and yet, if we look a little deeper, we can see how the relationship to God that Jesus opened up is very much at work through the text of the Joseph narratives.

The musical starts with the Narrator singing "Way, way back many centuries ago not long after the Bible began." So immediately we know that the story is going to be an ancient one and while not from the earliest of bible texts, it is from the first book in the Hebrew bible. Then the Narrator gives the line which all who have been in the chorus for "Joseph" will remember as their first cue. "Jacob lived in the land of Canaan, a fine example of a family man."

Now here comes the first social and cultural issue for us. Yes it is a striking concept to hear that someone in ancient times other than the oldest son is being favoured by a tender loving parent but is it really a fine example of family life for one son to be favoured above the others? Do we really think it a good thing that this son was given the best coat, encouraged to consider himself better than the others and in growing up taking many opportunities to let those others know how much better than them he considered himself to be. Perhaps the chorus have tongue in cheek as they respond "Jacob, Jacob and Sons. A fine example of a family man."

And at the end of the musical Joseph sings "Any Dream Will Do." Well, will any dream do?

Specifically, the song brings the musical to a conclusion with Joseph saying that he will return to the beginning and asking for the bringing of his coloured coat, his amazing technicolour colour coat. We should not let this be all sugary and sentimental. Far too much has happened on the way: there has been jealousy, betrayal, deceit, abuse of power, trickery and people have lost their lives. But there has also been the emergence of Joseph as a great leader. The precocious, boastful young man has grown wise and his gift of interpreting dreams has become a precious characteristic and a vital way in helping the people to live in the hardest of times.

Most of all, Joseph has learned to be generous and gracious including to his brothers who many years before had sold him into slavery. The part of the story when he finally reveals himself to his brothers, forgives them and they are re-united is one of the most moving parts of the Bible. We will hear that next week.

Perhaps John Hume, a key contributor to the Good Friday Agreement, drew inspiration from the Joseph story. And in the mess that is Lebanon we can also pray that such a person may emerge so that the way of justice, peace and reconciliation will bring the people there together after so many years of discord, division and suffering.