

## A SERVICE FOR ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

### GREETING

In the name of the Father  
and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

The Lord be with you;  
**and also with you.**

HYMN – *Our God Reigns* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQRmFXNA2Q>

### OPENING PRAYER

**Almighty God,**  
**to whom all hearts are open,**  
**all desires known**  
**and from whom no secrets are hidden:**  
**cleanse the thoughts of our hearts**  
**by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,**  
**that we may perfectly love you,**  
**and worthily magnify your holy name;**  
**through Christ our Lord.**  
**Amen.**

### PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.'

So let us turn away from sin and turn to the Lord, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

*Matthew 4: 17*

Friend of sinners,  
you bring hope in our despair.

Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

Healer of the sick,  
you give strength in our weakness.

Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

Destroyer of evil,  
you bring life in our dying.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Almighty God,  
who in Jesus Christ has given us  
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed,  
forgive you your sins,  
open your eyes to God's truth,  
strengthen you to do God's will,  
and give you the joy of his salvation  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

**Amen.**

FIRST BIBLE READING - *Genesis 45: 1-15*

THE LOVE OF GOD

Let us love one another:

for love is from God.

**Those who love are born of God and know God:  
but those who do not love know nothing of God; for God is love.**

Those who dwell in love:  
are dwelling in God and God in them.

**There is no room for fear in love:  
love which is perfected banishes fear.**

We love because God first loved us:  
if anyone who hates another says, 'I love God,' that person is a liar.

**If we do not love those whom we have seen:  
it cannot be that we love God whom we have not seen.**

This commandment we have from God:  
that those who love God must also love their neighbour.

*1 John 4: 7,8,16,18-21*

Glory to God, Source of All Being,  
Eternal Word and Holy Spirit;  
**as it was in the beginning is now;  
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

GOSPEL READING – *Matthew 16: 13-20*

REFLECTION - *Revd. Helen Duckett*

During lock-down one experience which has reunited us all has been the experience of being separated from family and friends – not able to see each other face to face and to visit each other in our homes. Recently, of course, some of the Covid guidelines have been lifted; and many of us have had the fortune to be re-united with our loved ones once again. However, we still cannot hug our parents, children and grandchildren; and we must remember that a significant minority of people have still not been able to be physically see each other yet – either because they live at too greater a distance, or they live in a care home, or because of a medical condition.

Well in our Bible reading for today from Genesis 45, we are on-lookers to a touching family reunion – a reunion of a group of siblings who have been separated from each other for years and years. Joseph and his 11 brothers. And of course, as we discovered last week, this separation has been brought not because of Covid or any other health pandemic but because of Joseph's dysfunctional relationship with the others which led to sibling rivalry, jealousy, hate and Joseph finally being sold into slavery in Egypt.

Twenty-five years later, Joseph and his brothers are re-united once again. The brothers have had no idea what has become of Joseph over the years – no idea that Joseph has worked his way up from slavery to being one of the most powerful men in Egypt. And of course, no news of his family has reached Joseph in all of that time. The family has only come together in our Bible passage because of a severe seven-year long famine which has devastated Egypt and the surrounding nations. It is a famine that the Pharaoh of Egypt saw in his dreams – dreams which Joseph interpreted and which led to Pharaoh putting Joseph in charge of stockpiling the storehouses of Egypt so that the country could survive the long drawn-out drought. In the midst of the hunger and devastation, Egypt survived - the country had enough food – thanks to Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. No wonder Joseph had become so powerful in the land of Egypt. And no wonder too, that when his brothers and their families began to starve in the land of Canaan, they journeyed to Egypt to seek food – not because they knew anything about Joseph and about what he had become but because they were desperate...

So Joseph's brothers come to Egypt looking for food. When they meet with Joseph, they do not recognise him because he has changed so much and also because they are simply not expecting him to be one of the most powerful rulers in Egypt. Joseph, however, does recognise them – he recognises these brothers who so many years before betrayed him and sold him into slavery because of their jealousy and hatred that he was their Father's favourite child.

The question is: how is Joseph going to respond? Will he seek revenge? Will he take the long years of hurt and betrayal out on his brothers? Will he refuse to give them food – send them away with nothing to eat? Will he have them arrested and put in jail – sold into slavery themselves just as they sold him?

Well today's Bible reading provides the answer...

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks once said: "Perfect repentance comes about when you find yourself in the same situation but this time you act differently. That is proof in action of a change in heart."

Joseph in today's reading has every justification to take revenge. Here are his brothers who betrayed him and sold him into slavery. Who could blame him if he turned the tables on them and had them arrested and enslaved? ,

What does Joseph do? He forgives them, he forgives his brothers.

Just read once more these beautiful, touching words which Joseph says to the very people who 25 years previously so betrayed him: "I am Joseph... Come closer to me... I am your brother, Joseph whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life... 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; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt... 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... so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty."

These words are so significant and also so challenging for us. Joseph is forgiving his brothers – that in itself is a big enough task. But Joseph also goes beyond this – he gives to his brothers – he gives them the food that he needs. And then, Joseph goes beyond this – he provides for his brothers and their families, he nourishes them – providing them with a place to live in Goshen where they will be safe throughout the famine.

Many of us struggle with forgiving those who betray us, let alone giving to them once we forgive, but to provide for them, to nourish them? Hard to conceive, isn't it? Joseph doesn't toss food to them like animals. He nourishes them, he provides for them, he loves them.

As we have been reading through the Book of Genesis over the summer, we have seen the family of Abraham torn apart by rivalries, jealousies, betrayals, hurts, abuse and pain. Now, we have a story of forgiveness and reconciliation. And the reason this story is different from those that have gone before is that Joseph has not allowed himself to become a prisoner of his hurt and pain and bitterness but rather, has allowed his faith in God, his faith that God is with him in his suffering, Joseph has allowed his faith, allowed his God to transform him. Joseph's life up to this point has been a roller coaster ride – beloved son, hated brother, good slave, the prisoner, helper to Pharaoh. And yet through all this, he is able to see God's presence in his suffering and in his success. God has brought life out of death; God has brought him out of the pit to the pinnacle.

It's not that God caused or even allowed Joseph's suffering; rather, it is that God is present with us in our suffering and can give us the strength and the courage to overcome evil with good.

We don't simply "get over" the things like Joseph experienced. Rather, as Madeleine L'Engle writes, "we learn to live with them, to go on growing and deepening, and understanding, as Joseph understood, that God can come into all our pain and make something creative out of it." L'Engle claims that Joseph learned to be a human being. He learned to be fallible and he learned to allow others to be fallible, too.

The story of Joseph and his brothers is not simply a story of long ago. It is a story which challenges us to love, forgive, give to and provide for not just those we love and like, but also for those who have broken our hearts, who have betrayed our trust, who have wronged us and left us wanting to either lash out or to run the other way. The story of Joseph is a story about forgiveness and about how much true, genuine forgiveness costs. It is also a story about the reconciliation which can be brought about when we choose to forgive. Our Bible passage for today, ends with Joseph and his brothers weeping and embracing one another. May we in our own lives and in our own relationships have the courage to forgive, to be forgiven, and to be reconciled...

Amen.

HYMN – *I The Lord Of Sea And Sky* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zr9SMm1gll>

#### AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Let us declare our faith in God,

**We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God:  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

**Amen.**

#### INTERCESSIONS

God of heaven and earth, through Jesus Christ you promise to hear us when we pray to you in faith with thanksgiving.

We pray for one another, for our families and friends, through whom we learn to love and be loved. Thank you for all who care for us. Give us grace to serve Christ by serving our neighbours and our community, loving others as he loves us.

*Silence*

We thank you for the unfailing love you hold out to everyone in Jesus Christ. Comfort and heal those in sorrow, need, sickness of any other trouble. Give them courage and hope in their distress and bless those who minister to them.

*Silence*

We remember with gratitude your many gifts to us in creation. Help us and people everywhere to share with justice and peace the resources of the earth. Give wisdom to those in authority among us and to all leaders of the nations.

*Silence*

We pray for your Church throughout the world, thanking you for all who serve Christ and his kingdom. By your Spirit strengthen your people for their work and witness in the world. Unite us in your truth and love, that we who confess your name may also reflect your glory.

*Silence*

We remember with thanksgiving all who have died in Christ, and we rejoice at the faithful witness of your saints in every age, praying that we may enter with them into the unending joy of your heavenly kingdom.

*Silence*

Merciful God, you look with compassion on all who turn to you.

Hear the prayers of your people.

**Grant that what we have asked in faith we may be grace receive;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**Amen.**

COLLECT FOR TRINITY 11

**God of glory,  
the end of our searching,  
help us to lay aside**

**all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom,  
and to give all that we have  
to gain the pearl beyond all price,  
through our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**

**LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

**HYMN – I Will Praise You - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfzkDEiXiBM>**

**BLESSING**

The peace of God,  
which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds  
in the knowledge and love of God,  
and of his Son, Jesus Christ;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you , and remain with you always.

**Amen.**

**DISMISSAL**

Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ, Amen.**

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