

Scripture Readings and Sermon

August 9, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Genesis 37:3–8, 11–12, 18–28 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

After Jacob's struggle with the stranger in chapter 32, Jacob reconciles with his brother Esau and settles in the land of Canaan in chapter 33. Chapter 34 is the story of the rape of Jacob's daughter Dinah and the retaliation by Jacob's son through the use of circumcision. In chapter 35, God leads Jacob to Bethel where there is a retelling of the naming of Israel and a renewal of the covenant. Rachel dies after giving birth to Benjamin and Isaac dies soon after. Chapter 36 wraps up the story of Esau and provides the background of the tribes that the people known as Israel will have to deal with on their return from Egypt.

The Book of Genesis turns to the last patriarch, Joseph in chapter 37. The story of Joseph giving a bad report on his brother, the giving of the special coat by Jacob, and the two dreams by Joseph provide the background incentive for his brothers selling Joseph into slavery. How Joseph came to be sold deals primarily with two of the sons of Leah, Rueben and Judah. Rueben, the oldest, may not want to kill Joseph because he is already in trouble for sleeping with his father's wife Bilhah (35:22), the mother of Dan and Naphtali and maid of Rachel (Note: 1 Chronicles 5:1 says that Rueben forfeits his birthright to Joseph because of Bilhah). The next oldest two, Simeon and Levi, may be silent because they were responsible for the slaughter in chapter 34 after Dinah's rape. It is Judah, fourth oldest, who sells Joseph for twenty pieces of silver.

Genesis 37:11 Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Notice that Joseph only speaks what he has seen - no interpretation. Have you been in trouble for simply speaking the truth?

What did the father think about these dreams - he too had dreams from God?

Why did the father show favoritism even though it caused division?

Why did Joseph not complain when he was thrown into the well?

Is this story easier knowing that it is God's plan of salvation?

Commentary on Matthew 14:22–33 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

After Jesus heard about the death of John, he went to a deserted place only to find people in need. Jesus did not suppress his grief or need for space but rather simply postponed it until after the people were healed and fed. Once the people's needs were met, he sent them and the disciples away so that he could go "up the mountain by himself to pray". This differs from John's account which states that he went to the mountain to avoid the people making him king. For Matthew, spending time in prayer was not only necessary for his soul but also meant that he avoided being in the high seas. In Mark, the point of the walking on water was help his disciples in rough waters and to calm the seas. Jesus walking on water, in the Gospel of John, was another sign of his power so that when he reaches the boat, they miraculously are at shore. For Matthew, however, the story is a story of faith. After spending time with his Father, Jesus walks out on calmer water between 3 and 6 a.m. and meets the disciples. The response of the disciples in all three gospels is fear that they are seeing a ghost. After giving a word of peace, Peter in this story asks Jesus to prove himself by commanding him to walk on water. Peter lacks the faith in Jesus' words of peace or his power to keep Peter afloat. Peter's fleeting faith lasts just long enough to walk out to Jesus but then the wind and the waves quickly washed it away. The rough waters in Matthew are seen as representing the doubts and fears of the disciples. When Jesus enters the boat, all fears are gone and the wind ceases.

Matthew 14:31 Jesus says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When have you stepped out in faith only to be plagued by second thoughts?
Does it seem that God believes in you more than you do?
Notice that Jesus walks on water after praying. When has pray calmed your seas?
Do you make time for prayer or feel rushed to start crossing the lake only to find that if you had prayed then you would not have wasted so much time and effort?
Is God calling you to prayer now? Are you being called to step out of the boat? Or do you simply need Jesus to calm the chaos of your life right now?
Have you ever been part of a planned "act of compassion" that seems to fall short and feels inauthentic?

Commentary on Romans 10:5–15 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

In the rest of Romans 9, Paul rejects claims of righteousness either through racial purity or lawful obedience. Going back to the naming of Isaac, Paul claims that the true inheritors are those who have faith in the promise. This faith can be found even in the Gentiles who follow Jesus by faith alone without the assurance of the Scriptures (Old Testament). The law can only be correctly followed if it is correctly interpreted. Jesus is the only fully revealed word and so is the only one who can fully follow the law. This is Paul's point about Moses' comment concerning righteousness, that is no one accept Jesus can fully live by the law. The Law promises both salvation (who will ascend) and condemnation (who will descend) based on obedience. Faith relies completely upon the living Word, Jesus. Giving one's heart, the seat of all intentions, to Jesus, the true interpretation of the law, is the only way to be justified. Where the heart is shapes what proceeds from the mouth. The heart is not distinguished by Jew or Greek and so responds to the call of faith equally. This response, however, can only come as a result of hearing the deepest desire of the heart - Jesus. Deep calls to deep.

Romans 10:15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?

When have you felt the calling of 'the deep'? When a part of you awakens that you never knew existed?

Have you ever left the rule book only to find its true meaning is greater than any book?

A technician performs a task perfectly. An artist performs it beautifully.

When has God challenged you to be an artist of faith?

Sermon "Come and Go" (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

Have you ever felt like Joseph stuck at the bottom of the well or maybe you are Peter rowing in a boat going nowhere? Have you ever hoped for someone to help or at help you find help? Sometime you don't know what you need? If there was just someone who understood and knew where or how to help? The scripture readings today not only describe our current situation, but also tells where we can find help and, once we have help, how to share it with others.

On the surface, the story of Joseph sound like a soap opera especially when you study the family dynamics a little closer (see *Going Deeper*). Sometimes the scriptures offer us advice or words of hope but sometimes the story holds a mirror up to our own life. There three primary groups in this story: Joseph, his brothers, and Jacob/Israel. At times, we have all shared something in common with each. Jacob as the father should have seen how his treatment of Joseph was affecting the dynamics in the family especially given his own relationship with Esau. Jacob, however, appears to be clueless to role he plays in what is about to happen. When have we been 'clueless' to how our actions have affected others? Sensing the injustice of the situation, Joseph's brothers feel a growing level of resentment that reaches its conclusion with the selling of Joseph. Is this our story? Do we become tired of witnessing injustice and those who don't do receiving all the rewards? It easy to put ourselves in the brother's shoes when we see others getting something for nothing while we struggle just to get by. Much of the current resentment against immigration is rooted in a sense of injustice not against the

people seeking a better life but for those born here but still view the 'better life' as out of reach. Then there are those who have struggled for generations to achieve the 'better life' only to have it threatened by a shrinking middle class. The brother's anger is not so hard to imagine. Joseph's own actions did not help and, if he is honest with himself, he aggravated the situation by his dreams and wearing the coat to go look for his brothers. Have we ever made things worse only later regretting our actions? Have you ever been in a position when you ask yourself, "What was I thinking or was I thinking at all?" How easy it is to see our own life reflected in those portrayed in this story.

If the story of Joseph describes the mess we find ourselves in, then the story of Jesus walking on water offers us the promise of hope in the midst of our mess. The disciples had found themselves in a mess. While Jesus was praying, the disciples had tried to go on ahead by boat only to battle against the wind and waves. Like a hamster and their wheel, the disciples rowed and rowed and got nowhere. In the midst of their struggle, Jesus walks to them and proclaim a word of peace. Has God ever spoken a word of peace to you in the middle of your struggles? Sometimes God speaks in the most unlikely of places. So unlikely that like Peter, we want confirmation that it is really God. Despite our doubt, Jesus speaks to us, "Come!" This calls for a leap of faith. A rejection of the world's skepticism and a childlike trust that if God calls then God will make a way. Like Peter, we often begin strong until "reality" kicks in and we loss faith. When we call out, however, Jesus will save and not only save but get into our boat, get into our lives, to help us and calm the our storms. We may be like Joseph or the disciples, but Jesus has come and is coming to pull us from the pit and calm our storm. Not just for us but for everyone who calls on the Lord.

If we are not looking for Jesus on the sea or help in the pit, will we miss God's word of hope and salvation? If we are not listening for that word of peace, will we know that Jesus is listening for our cry for help? We may have been saved but there are others who are still in the pit and in the middle of the storm. How will they know where to look or who to listen for if no one tells them? Only those who have been in the pit or in the storm can speak with authenticity to those that find themselves in similar situations. The Body of Christ is made up of so many different members with so many gifts because there are so many different people that need to hear the good news. That God can help them because we were in their shoes and God brought us safely out. Jesus not only tells us to "Come" and find salvation in him but he tells us to "Go" and let others know that they don't have to be like Jacob, Joseph, the disciples, or the brothers. There is a better way. Our call today is to both come and go.