



NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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August 2, 2020
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

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Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Jacob's wrestling match with GOD continued all night and the result was that he was blessed. He was persistent – and GOD encourages persistence in all areas of our lives, including the spiritual. We all have areas of our spiritual lives where some extra persistence would help. Strong character develops as we struggle with tough conditions.

GOD gave many Bible people new names – Abram become Abraham, Sarai become Sarah, Simon became Peter. In this passage, we see how Jacob's character had changed. Jacob, the ambitious deceiver, became Israel, the one who struggles with GOD and overcomes. Psalm 17 is a prayer of David and a cry for help of a person beset by persecutors and seeking GOD's

judgement and deliverance. There is a suggestion that the petitioner may have spent the night in prayer in the sanctuary awaiting GOD's help – receiving vindication in the morning. The basic petition is to be heard and judged. The one praying may have been falsely accused and seeks vindication – hoping perhaps for a divine decision through a priest. The persecuted one protests that they are innocent and righteous, offers to be tested in this regard and is confident of GOD's righteous judgement when the night is over.

In our passage from Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul expressed concern for his people by saying that he would willingly take their punishment if that could save them. While the only one who can save us is JESUS, Paul showed a rare depth of love. Like JESUS, he was willing to sacrifice for others. Are we concerned enough about those who do not know CHRIST to sacrifice our time, money, energy, comfort and safety to see them come to faith in JESUS?

The JEWS viewed GOD's choosing of Israel in the Old Testament as being like adoption. They were undeserving and without rights as natural children – yet GOD adopted them and granted them the status of His sons and daughters.

GOD's word, in the form of beautiful covenant promises, came to Abraham. Covenant people, the true children of Abraham, are not just his biological descendants. They are all those who trust in GOD and in what JESUS has done for them.

The Jews were proud of the fact that their lineage was from Isaac, whose mother was Sarah – Abraham's legitimate wife – rather than Ishmael, whose mother was Hagar – Sarah's maidservant. Paul asserts that no one can claim to be chosen by GOD because of their heritage or good deeds. GOD freely chooses to save whomever He wills. The doctrine of election teaches that it is GOD's sovereign choice to save us by His goodness and mercy, and not by our own merit.

Was it right for GOD to choose Jacob, the younger, to be over Esau? In the Old Testament book of Malachi, the statement “I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated” refers to the nations of Israel and Edom rather than the individual brothers. GOD chose Jacob to continue the family line of the faithful because He knew his heart was for GOD. But He did not exclude Esau from knowing and loving Him. We need to keep in mind the kind of GOD we worship – He is sovereign, He is not arbitrary, in all things He works for our good, He is trustworthy; and He will save all who believe in Him. When we understand these qualities of GOD, we know that His choices are good – even if we don’t understand all His reasons.

The fallacy of gaining salvation by human efforts remains, for some, as strong as ever. People still think good intentions are the key to unlock the door to eternal life. By the time they get to try the lock, however, they will find that their key doesn’t fit. Others imagine that their efforts are building an invisible ladder to heaven

made up of service, family, position, reputation, good work, and desire – although none of these rungs will support even a feather. People are so busy trying to reach GOD that they completely miss the truth that GOD has already reached down to them. We cannot earn GOD's mercy – if we could, it would not be mercy.

Our gospel for today is the famous miracle story of the feeding of the 5,000. Trappist monk Father Simeon compares the freedom and joy of self-giving love demonstrated by JESUS with the elitist and frivolous celebration banquet given by Herod for himself where he ends up beheading John the Baptist. Herod is the taker of life whilst JESUS is the giver of life – each from the very centre of their being.

British theologian Angus Ritchie suggests that “Despite having sought peace and solitude following the death of His cousin John the Baptist, JESUS responds to the needs of the crowd by curing those who are sick. Likewise, when the crowd grows hungry, He rejects the

disciples' suggestion that He should simply send them away. Disciples of JESUS cannot just abandon those in need to their fate.

The desert setting of JESUS' miracle of feeding harkens back to the manna in the wilderness. The feeding of this multitude is described in terms that are unmistakably eucharistic. JESUS looks up to heaven in a priestly gesture of offering. He blesses and breaks the loaves; and gives them to the apostles to distribute to the crowds. These actions point forward to the sacrifice of His own Body – with which CHRIST will freely give His hungry people true and lasting nourishment.

Table fellowship stood at the heart of JESUS' earthly ministry; and this feeding miracle is the 'one deed of power' recounted by all 4 Gospel writers. A study by the Reverend Shirlyn Toppin – a Methodist minister in London – of regular shared feasting in one inner-city congregation shows how it sustains deep and genuinely

mutual relationships¹. As she observes, “attitudes to food have always been integral to the spiritual life.” In the midst of a pandemic, the manner in which we live this out will, of course, be very different – as any such rhythms of corporate meals are necessarily disrupted. But the sharing of food remains a vital part of faithful Christian witness in these days. This will involve both the meeting of immediate need and the reiteration of the prophet Isaiah’s invitation: **Isaiah 55** – ¹Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

¹ “‘Soul Food’ Theology: Pastoral Care and Practice through the sharing of meals: A Womanist Reflection” in *Black Theology*, 2006.

my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

This will draw people away from idolatrous forms of life which generate injustice, into the abundance of the divine economy.

Eucharistic worship must lead on to truly eucharistic lives. Such lives will exhibit that “freedom from self-concern” which enables us to see our neighbour as a gift and not an interruption. The life we receive from CHRIST is constantly offered and blessed, broken and distributed, for a world that hungers in body and in spirit.



Jacob shows us that if we persevere with GOD, He will bless us.

Our psalmist shows that our relationship with GOD should be open enough so that it can be tested easily. Paul teaches us that our love for others needs to be sacrificial; and our Gospel teaches us that Eucharistic worship must lead on to truly eucharistic lives. Such lives will exhibit that “freedom from self-concern” which enables us to see each other as a gift and not an interruption. The life we receive from CHRIST is constantly offered and blessed, broken and distributed, for a world that hungers in body and in spirit.



May we pray:

Loving and merciful GOD, You have nourished Your people in every age with abundant blessings. Give to us the conviction of Your Son that we might bring His compassion to all those who seek Your goodness. This we pray in the name of JESUS. Amen

Life Application Study Bible

Daily Prayer 2020

Harper Collins Study Bible – NRSV

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/31-july/faith/sunday-s-readings/8th-sunday-after-trinity> Date accessed 31 July 2020