

## **Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost 7th August 2005**

### **Rob Lamerton**

- Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28
- Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22 page 323
- Romans 10: 4-15
- Matthew 14: 22-36

*changed sermon at 10am. Righteousness section not used.*

focus on Peter

who confesses Jesus as Messiah; then misunderstands;  
at the Transfiguration... he doesn't know what to say.

at the Crucifixion... he promises faithfulness, then denies  
Jesus three times.

Faith — living in relation with God means stepping out and  
being willing to learn from the times when we sink.

1. Hiroshima Day: victory in the Pacific | 60th anniversary.
2. Righteousness

Today in our Old Testament Reading, we begin the amazing  
saga of the ups and downs of the life of Joseph with his  
being sold into slavery by his brothers!

This is not a normal or a natural thing to do to a brother, so  
we are probably asking WHY? Why would they do that?

Well, we find a few clues in our story:

- a. Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than any of his  
other children because he was the son of his old  
age.  
— He is the favoured one and the long robe with  
the sleeves seems to reveal true favouritism.  
Jealousy, Rivalry, Envy...
- b. Joseph is the "dreamer"! "Here comes this  
dreamer" say the brothers as he approaches. Now  
you may recall that Joseph had a couple of dreams  
about how his brothers would bow down to him. So

Joseph the second youngest had suggested he would rule over his family.

Annoyance, Disbelief, Intolerance!...

And so begins the bumpy ride of Joseph's life as he is thrown into a pit and then sold into slavery and transported to Egypt.

It is the beginning of the story also of how God's people become slaves, because just when you think Joseph has been God's agent to save his family from starvation, you find that another story is unfolding to keep the family of Israel captive in Egypt.

In this story, which begins today, amidst ALL the traumas faced by Joseph — A sense that through it all, Joseph's relationship with God is steadfast!

In fact, Joseph who starts out as a spoilt brat, maintains a high level of right behaviour and relationship with God in all the disasters which befall him — He displays righteousness!

Now, this word has been cropping up regularly in our readings from Romans, and I thought we should examine it a little more closely.

In the scriptures, righteousness is the quality of God to be seen in God's saving acts. Correspondingly, righteousness for humanity depends on our **response** to God's activity, our acceptance of the **relationship** it opens up for us!

**Jesus** contrasts the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees with that which belongs to God's kingdom — the righteousness of God which apparently the publicans and harlots have found.

**St Paul** contrasts the righteousness of the law — the righteousness he knew — with the righteousness of faith — which he became aware of — that is the righteousness of relationship with God, which the zealous observers of the law have not discovered.

**Luther** contrasted [with Christian righteousness] the civil righteousness; legally correct conduct or dutiful behaviour; which is good for the well being of Society, but even sinful people are capable of it. Outward conduct however, does not always reveal a person's inner relationship with God.

Paul writes: Christ is the end of the law (meaning the conclusion or the fulfilment of the law) so that there may be righteousness for all who believe. In other words, righteousness (relationship with God) is no longer following the law BUT is about faith.

He then draws the contrast of Moses and the law with the righteousness of faith which is NOT written.

Instead "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart."

The whole point of the argument is to show that righteousness is first of all about relationship — the faithful acceptance of the grace of God — in Christ and the Spirit.

Righteousness in Christian terms is **never** about earning God's favour by Good Behaviour.

**However!** The nature of our righteous relationship with God should produce outcomes.

Sometimes the word "Justify" is used! Whether it is used about lining up the paragraphs of a page, or in the accounting sense, or in conversation, it is about putting things right.

Being justified — right with God is about relationship — faith, hope, love!

**Finally!** I want to use the gospel story as an illustration of two aspects of faith.

In the story we have Peter, known for his impetuosity, his ability to open his mouth only to put his foot in it, with the other disciples in the boat in the wind and the waves.

When he sees Jesus, he seems to overdo it and tries something bigger than his faith will allow. "Lord if it is you" he says, "Command me to come to you on the water." When he does so, he becomes aware of the wind and fear overtakes him and he sinks. Peter is an example that sometimes we overstep the mark and try things too big for our faith — he reminds us that our faith is built on experiences like these — where we feel we are sinking, but somehow Christ comes to us to hold us by the hand.

Then in the story we also have the other disciples who remain in the boat — safety first is their motto! Their faith and relationship with God cannot countenance risk at this point but they are happy to watch Peter and Praise the Lord for his rescue!

We either try too hard, or we sit in the boat.

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This web site is designed and maintained by Linda Anchell.  
Write to:lindafrd@pcug.org.au  
Index page for the site is at <http://www.acay.com.au/~stphil>  
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