**New Kilpatrick**

**YouTube**

**23rd July 2023**

**Genesis 37:1-11, 44:23-29**

**Gathering**

Look at the wonder of it all

And call it out for what it is

Wonderful

Magnificent

Intriguing

Coloured-in with the colours of heaven

Sometimes straying outside the lines

Life

In all its confusion and messy beauty

Its pain and costly love

Such is the place of encounter

Not with a God who is standoffish

Distant from creation

Living in a different plain

But up to the divine neck in the same shared beauty

Brokenness

Confusion

And journey

And it is in such a place of worship

We bring it all

To the place where rumours of life and resurrection

Abound

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and thank you for the invitation to be with you again. We have been telling stories of some of the heroes of our faith, almost. Children who fight giants, tax collectors proved better than the religious establishment. Today, we have a dreamer whose story we can read as less a hero but a bitter, broken, lonely character who feels his family is against him. A very human place to be at times and we share it with Joseph without that long sleeved coat of his.

**Prayer**

God of life

And all its messiness

All the tangles we get ourselves into

All the confusion we create and hurts we feel

We pause with that now

And make space

For your presence

Possibility and grace

For the paths we take

The burdens we hold

That need sharing

That are heavy

And need to be set loose

We pause with that now

And make space

For your presence

Possibility and grace

For the stories we are

With muddled middles

Where we worry about outcomes

Can’t see clearly

Find ourselves wallowing

We pause with that now

And make space

For your presence

Possibility and grace

And in doing so

May we glimpse that gift

Of life

And its fulness

That journey we share

With you

The presence beside us

The possibility between us

And grace handed to us

Unconditionally

God of life

Of the patriarchs and the people

The ancients and the contemporaries

The firsts and the nows

All people in and out of faith

This generously diverse

And magnificent world

In the hope we find in each other

And the peace that is possible between us

We pause with that now

And make space

For your presence

Possibility and grace

As we share the Lord’s Prayer

**Scripture Background**

We’ve been retelling a few of the iconic stories of our faith these last weeks. It has been a random bundle but that’s no bad thing. Letting one story sit beside another, with no connection other than they are stories from our tradition, perhaps lets us hear connections and possibilities as one story speaks into another.

However, they aren’t quite random as the stories we have told, Jonah, Zacchaeus, David and Goliath, Adam and Eve and, today, Joseph, are among the top big stories people go to first when they are asked their favourite Bible story. And we imagine we know them. And we do. The remembered version, but each of these stories has more to tell, as we have found they can be heard at many different levels and in many different contexts. They aren’t monochrome in their telling but deep with colour and texture and humanity.

Which is equally true of Joseph’s story. It is the longest single story we have in the Bible that is uninterrupted and from the one source. But that doesn’t make it a story with one insight. Quite the opposite. It is too long to tell in one sitting so we top and tail it, perhaps doing it an injustice in doing so, but the middle bit can distract us from some of the powerful human emotions that drive the whole tale.

**Reading: Genesis 37:1-11**

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. **2**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. **3**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.[a] **4**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.

**5**Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. **6**He said to them, ‘Listen to this dream that I dreamed. **7**There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf.’ **8**His brothers said to him, ‘Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?’ So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

**9**He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, ‘Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.’ **10**But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, ‘What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?’ **11**So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

**Genesis 44:23-29**

Then you said to your servants, “Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.” **24**When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. **25**And when our father said, “Go again, buy us a little food”, **26**we said, “We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother goes with us, will we go down; for we cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.” **27**Then your servant my father said to us, “You know that my wife bore me two sons; **28**one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. **29**If you take this one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to Sheol.

Question: What happened between the beginning and the end?

What burdens did both father and son carry?

What unfulfilled life was experienced because of misunderstanding and hurt?

**Reflection**

Joseph has just had his dreams as a precocious teenager. As we know, they didn’t go down well. How could they? Joseph has dreamt this situation where his entire family find themselves on their knees in front of him.

But we know the ending. That is exactly what happens in Egypt. But there is a some very human emotional trauma going on between the dreams and their fulfilment.

Joseph has disclosed his dreamlife to his brothers and parents. His dad has the worst reaction: “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?”

Soon after this, Jacob sends his ‘favourite’ son out to the wilderness to meet his brothers. What on earth is going through Joseph’s head? He can only imagine how he will be greeted by them, and that his dad has deliberately sent him out, to those who love him least.

And we see the cold bloodedness of it all. The brothers put him in a pit saved only by Judah who suggests selling him as a slave and ruining his long-sleeved coat offering a bloodied version of it to his father as comeuppance for an arrogant son.

Joseph over the 22 years in Egypt never makes contact with family. Why should he? He imagines they all hate him, his father included.

Unknown to him, however, there is an unexpected reaction from his father to the animal ravaged coat. Jacob refuses to be comforted. Don’t dismiss that phrase too quickly.

It is actually against Jewish law to refuse comfort. But the Midrash suggests the only time to be comforted is when you are sure the person is dead. So here we have some insight into a broken father who refuses to believe Joseph is dead. He sees the evidence, but perhaps sees through it. Either way Jacob hangs on to the hope that Joseph is alive.

Joseph doesn’t know this, however. He is still imagining everyone hates him and he is better off imagining everyone thinks he is dead.

But when the brothers arrive in Egypt seeking grain, having been asked to bring Benjamin with them, Jospeh finally hears their backstory. Remember he is still not recognised by them, and the story finishes with these words: their father refused to allow the brothers to come back to Egypt with Benjamin, because in Jacob’s words: “You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, ‘He has surely been torn to pieces.’ And I have not seen him since. If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my grey head down to the grave in misery.”

It was then Joseph realises what home life has been life for the last 22 years, his father never over his grief, and what he imagined was a bitter old man who was glad to see the back of him, was actually a father almost broken by grief.

Then he revealed who he was, and the fulfilment of the dreams were unimportant. Joseph being right, irrelevant. There is almost guilt that everything he dreamed of turned out true. But what is most important now is to reunite the family. To live in the love that was always there that had been swamped by 22 years mulling over the bitterness.

It is, actually, a deeply human story about the way we let the presumptions of the past play a role in shaping a less than fulfilled future. Yet, also the greater truth of a God who is not conditioned like that, always always always growing to overcome that with a greater sense of love, ready to offer a better, richer, more sacred way to live together.

The story itself is a dream of what our sacred history constantly holds before us, urges us towards, and promises will one day be fulfilled.

**Questions**

**Who are we in the Joseph story?**

**What bitternesses are we holding?**

**Stories have a beginning, a muddle and an end. Where are we in the muddle?**

**And what is the protons in the Joseph story that invite fulfilment in us?**

**News**

**Epilogue**

A short story based on “Somebody’s Son” by Richard Pindell.

As David sat on the side of the road waiting for his next lift, he wrote:

“Dear Mum, if it is okay with Dad, I’d like to come home. I know there’s little chance it will be okay. I remember he said once, if I ever ran off, I might as well keep going. At the time leaving home felt like the only thing I could do. I needed to find out more about life and me. I don’t know where I will be next, but in a few days, I hope to be passing our place. If there’s any chance Dad will have me back, please ask him to tie a white cloth to the apple tree in the garden. I'll be going by on the train. If there’s no cloth on the tree, I’ll just quietly, and without any hard feelings toward Dad, keep going. Love, David”

David mailed the letter with a knot in his stomach. David hitchhiked with cars, vans, trucks, and trains, all the time edging closer home.

Finally, as he got on the train that would go past the house, the knot embedded itself in his core. He could hardly bring himself to imagine the apple tree for fear it would be empty.

As he sat down by the window an elderly gentleman sat beside him. As the journey proceeded, the two of them shared their stories. But soon the train tracks would take a gentle bend to the right, and there would be the house and garden. He couldn’t look – too afraid he would find, staring back at him, an empty tree.

Desperately, he nudged his travel companion beside him. “Will you do me a favour? Around this bend on the right, you’ll see an apple tree. I wonder if you’ll tell me if you see a white cloth tied to one of its branches.”

“Son,” the man said in a voice slow with wonder, “I see a white cloth tied on almost every twig.”

**Prayer**

Holy God

Sacred God

God invested in this world

And up to the divine neck in its muckyness

Hear us bring here

All that is unfulfilled

Where bitterness takes over from the generosity we ought to show

In Ukraine and a world facing grain shortages again

In Afghanistan where how the world treats regimes, shapes a terrible life for the least

In Yemen and Syria where leadership has been about self and loss of face

In our own communities

With distrust of politics

And consequences of strikes

And cost of living

May we pause in the muddle

And dare dream of the end

Of what we might be

What we can do together

What we can share and encourage in each other

What priorities and values we want as a nation

Holy God

Sacred God

God invested in this world

Hear us

Journey with us

And guide our dreams

Into reality

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**