

# The Paths Ahead

Lawrence Peak  
February 13<sup>th</sup> 2022

The Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is full of great stories full of adventure, betrayal, intrigue, selfishness, loyalty, dedication, tragedy – and sometimes triumph. The stuff of many a movie! And always in these stories, God is ever present in a most personal way. David and Goliath, Samson and his strength, Daniel in the lion's den and Shadrach Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, and Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Baal.

Today's reading relates one of these, right at the beginning in Genesis; the story of Joseph, his brothers, his abduction to Egypt and his devastated and grief-stricken father, Jacob.

Mind you, Jacob himself was a little slippery in his earlier days fooling his blind Father Isaac to give him the family blessing instead of his brother Esau.

And that for me is one reason why the Bible rings true; all the characters are so human and fallible – just like us and humankind generally in today's modern world.

Our reading relates the time when Joseph, now the right-hand man of Pharaoh and virtually running the country, reveals himself to his brothers, and there is forgiveness, reconciliation and many tears shed.

One can just imagine those feelings:-

Of Jacob – distraught at the loss of his favourite youngest son and facing the end of his life in a famine which was ruining his beloved property, home and livelihood.

The brothers - initially jealous and deceitful and then regretting their rash act and feeling acute guilt.

And there was Joseph the victim of his brothers' jealousy, wondering what the future held, and in trepidation of being a slave for the rest of his life, or worse, being put to death in a foreign country.

Throughout all this saga was God, very present to guide and sustain Joseph throughout his ordeals. Maybe also to open the eyes of Pharaoh to show him what an intelligent and lively person was young Joseph who had the God-given insight to interpret the strange dreams Pharaoh continued to have.

God can make all the difference in all the circumstances of our lives. He will not shield us from any crisis, trial or even tragedy occurring – we have to take the good with the bad like everyone else. What he will do however is to be with us

right throughout any of our trials, giving us the strength to cope and yes even transforming and redeeming these circumstances to bring out something positive from the whole affair and yes sometimes something even special and meaningful!

Joseph threw his arms around his brothers and wept as he forgave them and had this to say to them.

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done – the saving of many lives”

The Word of God has a strong message of promise for us all. When we tell someone “You have my word on it” we are making a promise, a vow to keep this promise. And right through the scriptures God makes promises to us

- \* He will always love us no matter what and who we are
  
- \* He will never forsake us
  
- \* He will give us the necessary strength to cope with all the circumstances of life in which we find ourselves
  
- \* He will reveal the true meaning and beauty of life to us
  
- \* He has prepared a place for us. A place to share with Him and to experience His loving presence for all eternity. A place of many mansions.

And He makes these promises no matter who we are. He sees us for what we really are warts and all and He **still** makes these promises to us.

All we need to do is to reach out to Him whose love already surrounds us. We need to acknowledge our need of Him. We need simply to draw upon His

saving grace and we will already be on our way to a better and more fulfilling life.

When we strip away the many simplistic and naive ideas of God and His support that can so easily cloud the issue, we find the true promises of our God. Promises of His Word that are rock solid!

- \* No promises of a comfortable life.
- \* No promises of easy windfalls.
- \* No promises of worldly success
- \* No promises of fame and popularity
- \* No promises of kid-glove treatment

But rock solid promises nonetheless to help us through life's journeys.

There is a movie entitled "The Way" which tells the story of Thomas, Tom, an American doctor who comes to France to collect the body of his son recently killed in the Pyrenees. He is irascible, and his life in the States has been insular and material – and yet he sets out to complete the pilgrimage on the "Camino de Santiago" – the Way of St James - on behalf of his son and to honour him. En route he rather reluctantly teams up with a Dutchman trying to lose weight, a Canadian woman trying to recover from an abusive husband and to quit smoking and an Irish writer with writer's block. All have their own problems and all are seeking solutions by way of this spiritual pilgrimage. When Tom finally reaches the end and sprinkles his son's ashes into the ocean, he is a changed man now seeing the difference between the life we live and the life we choose. And again, it is the journey that counts.

The Bible is full of journeys:-

- The Children of Israel journeying from Egypt into the Promised Land
- The holy family fleeing to Egypt with the baby Jesus.
- The journey of Jesus inexorably headed for Jerusalem and a cross. A journey we will be thinking about particularly in the coming Lenten season
- The two travellers journeying to Emmaus.
- The four journeys of Paul around the known world at the time.

In a sense we too here at St Ives Uniting are on a journey, and the past few years have been quite bumpy indeed! With Geoff and other good friends either leaving us or sadly dying and passing on to their reward, and of course the stringencies of Covid. And everything we have needed to cancel and all that uncertainty; we have often wondered what the future will hold. Fortunately, we now have the stability of Richie with us and we are currently exploring ways to extend his stay; and we are now making serious plans about the future – how to build on the great tradition we have here and the wonderful people we have in our family.

Joseph was very unsure of the paths ahead, yet with God close beside him all turned out well – and his Father Jacob got to live out his remaining days in Egypt in security and happiness surrounded by his family.

May God walk with us as we move into the future paths of 2022. May he guide us, strengthen us, support us and give us peace.

And finally to quote Billy Graham

*“I've read the last page of the Bible, it's all going to turn out all right.”*

Amen.

An anonymous prayer for the future

*May God make your year a happy one,  
Not by shielding you from all sorrows and pain  
But by strengthening you to bear it as it comes.  
Not by making your paths easy  
But by making you sturdy to tread any path.*

*Not by taking hardships from you,  
But by taking fear from your heart.  
Not by granting you unbroken sunshine  
But by keeping your face bright, even in the shadows.  
Not by making your life always pleasant,  
But by showing you when people and their causes need you most,  
And making you anxious to be there to help.  
God's love, peace, hope and joy for the year ahead.*

Amen