



ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SUNDAY, AUGUST 16TH, 2020

A Place at the Table!



Today we come to the climax of the story of Joseph, as he is reconciled with his brothers and meets his father Jacob, after so many years apart. The account itself is extraordinarily moving, as relationships that have foundered for many years are restored: brokenness, confession and restoration are central to the drama and theology. Along with this there is another theme, probably the major one: the issue of God's sovereignty and freedom to interact with human freedom – a theme that in contemporary times is seldom considered, given that as moderns, we have little sense of God as one who guides history. Notwithstanding, the conviction in this narrative, is that while God remains hidden behind the mists of human events and deeds, God is still present, involved in very tangible, but uncertain situations.

Psalm 133, which celebrates unity and community as an expression of God's grace, serves as a good positive reflection of the Joseph story about restoration, while the Gospel for this morning, deals with wholeness and community in a memorable fashion. There, Jesus is the impediment to community through his religiously based racism. To his refusal to serve the Canaanite woman, who he likens to a dog, the woman responds, "but even the dogs eat the leftovers that fall from their masters' table."

Let us explore this idea of "A Place at the Table"!

GATHERING

We Prepare Ourselves: Adoramus te Domine (We worship you O God) (Taizé)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90VtachH83nQ>

Adoramus Te Domine (Lord, we worship You)
 With the angels and archangels (Adoramus Te Domine)
 With the patriarchs and prophets (Adoramus Te Domine)
 With all who witness to the Gospel of the Lord (Adoramus Te Domine)
 With all Your people of the church throughout the world
 (Adoramus Te Domine)

Welcome

In the name of God,
 the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with you
And also with you

Lighting the Paschal Candle

Hymn/Song: Christ be Our Light, (Bernadette Farrell, Notre Dame University, Folk Choir, South Bend, Indiana, USA)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g0c4YeABTs>

Longing for light, we wait in darkness
 Longing for truth, we turn to You.
 Make us Your own, Your holy people
 Light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in Your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled
 Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Refrain

Longing for food, many are hungry
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us Your bread, broken for others
Shared until all are fed.

Refrain

**A Prayer of Celebration and Confession upon Today's Gospel
Reading: "A Place at the Table" (Matthew 15:21-28)**

Do we wish to learn the meaning of God's love among us?
Let us listen to the words of the Canaanite woman,
who knew she had a place at the table.

The clouds have paused their travelling to listen
to the song, the song of faith Christ hears her sing
in witness to the welcome of the table.

Send the letter to the cities, to the lonely
high-rise dwellers, to the stranger, to the poor.
Tell them they have places at the table.

Dial the telephones of the hurting, the ill and
the despairing; bring them in their neediness
to the healing in the welcome of the table.

The birds have sung their praises to the beauty
of the morning, of a new world beginning,
rejoicing in the bounty of the table.

The words are echoed in the blossoms,
in the sunrise, in the starlight: the words
that welcome us to our places at the table.

Do we yearn to see the face of God? We lift
the blindfold from our eyes at the table.

Thanks to Andrew King, “A Poetic Kind of Place”

Peace: We share the peace with each other from our homes. (This week the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle invites us to pray for the peoples of West Africa – Liberia and Sierra Leone. Both these countries have suffered their share of political disaster and human tragedy, not least Ebola and now the rise of Covid. Hear a child’s prayer from Liberia:

God, what kind of world is this
that the adult people are going to leave for us children?
There is fighting everywhere
and they tell us we live in a time of peace.
You are the only one who can help us.
Lord, give us a new world in which we can be happy,
in which we can have friends
and work together for a good future.
A world in which there will not be any cruel people
who seek to destroy us and our world in so many ways.

LET’S HEAR THE WORD

Some Thoughts about Equality in the Eyes of God: A Place at the Table

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Democracy... is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder; and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike. **Plato**

In America everybody is of the opinion that he has no social superiors, since all men are equal, but he does not admit that he has no social inferiors, for, from the time of Jefferson onward, the doctrine that all men are equal applies only upwards, not downwards.

Bertrand Russell

Humanism was not wrong in thinking that truth, beauty, liberty, and equality are of infinite value, but in thinking that man can get them for himself without grace. **Simone Weil**

Genesis 45:1-15

The climax of the story of Joseph contains high drama, overpowering emotion, deep contrition, and a further glimpse of God's direction of his people. Today's reading sees the resolution of the family events recounted last week in Genesis 37. Because of jealousy and hatred Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery. In the story Joseph is taken into slavery in Egypt, but through several fortuitous events he rises to the highest level in the Egyptian government. In the process of meeting after a long separation, the brothers undergo a difficult reckoning within their own lives. In Gen 44:16, on the second return of the brothers to Egypt after Joseph's silver cup had been discovered in Benjamin's bag (vv. 1-13), Judah says on behalf of the brothers: 'God has found out (our) guilt'. They speak not about the cup but about what they did to Joseph earlier in the story. Their change of heart and confession is exemplified in the episodes to follow.

While God's role in this story is revealed in the end, it is a fact that God has been hidden in all these events. A significant point of faith is explored here. It is the issue of the relation of the sovereignty of God and freedom of God to the freedom of humans in determining the course of events in this world. At points the future of the family of Jacob appears in the balance. The future of the promise of heirs to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is cast in doubt (Gen 12:1-3 etc.). The working out of the divine promise depends on passing Midianites or Ishmaelites (Genesis 37); it also depends on a butler's memory (40:23 and 41:9ff after a two-year lapse of memory). However, the story attests to God's working within this very uncertain situation.

45 Joseph was no longer able to control his feelings in front of his servants, so he ordered them all to leave the room. No one else was with him when Joseph told his brothers who he was. ² He cried with such loud sobs that the Egyptians heard it, and the news was taken to the king's palace. ³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But when his brothers heard this, they were so terrified that they could not answer. ⁴ Then Joseph said to them, "Please come closer." They did, and he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ Now do not be upset or blame yourselves because you sold me here. It was really God who sent me ahead of you to save people's lives. ⁶ This is only the second year of famine in the land; there will be five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor reaping. ⁷ God sent me ahead of you to rescue you in this amazing way and to make sure that you and your descendants survive. ⁸ So it was not really you who sent me here, but God. He has made me the king's highest official. I am in charge of his whole country; I am the ruler of all Egypt.

⁹“Now hurry back to my father and tell him that this is what his son Joseph says: ‘God has made me ruler of all Egypt; come to me without delay. ¹⁰You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me—you, your children, your grandchildren, your sheep, your goats, your cattle, and everything else that you have. ¹¹If you are in Goshen, I can take care of you. There will still be five years of famine; and I do not want you, your family, and your livestock to starve.’”

¹² Joseph continued, “Now all of you, and you too, Benjamin, can see that I am really Joseph. ¹³Tell my father how powerful I am here in Egypt and tell him about everything that you have seen. Then hurry and bring him here.”

¹⁴ He threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and began to cry; Benjamin also cried as he hugged him. ¹⁵ Then, still weeping, he embraced each of his brothers and kissed them. After that, his brothers began to talk with him.

The word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Psalm 133 (Good News Translation)

In a world where conflict makes the news more readily than peace and harmony, and where governments can foster fear among electors for their self-interest, Psalm 133 sounds quite a different note. As we probe the images of this psalm we find that it strikes what might even be called in our context a counter-cultural note. This short psalm is one of those in the collection referred to as the ‘Songs of Ascents’. They comprise Psalms 120-134 and each has the superscription ‘a song of ascents’. There has been a lot of speculation about this collection. They are of different lengths and genres, can be dated to different times, and have different concerns, raising the question of why they have the same superscription. Their general brevity and a common theme of ‘Zion’, are about all that seems to tie them together.

Having made the statement that it is good and pleasant for kindred to live ‘as one’, i.e. in unity, the psalm develops this theme by means of two vivid metaphors. The first may not sound like a particularly delightful thing to our ears. It is of oil running down the head, beard and collar of Aaron. We ought to remember, however, that Aaron was Moses’ brother and in the exodus story was designated as a priest and head of the priestly line (Exodus 28-29). The oil spoken of here is that of the anointing of the priest in the midst of his people. The oil is referred to as ‘precious’, in Hebrew literally ‘good’, linking the act of anointing the priest to the statement in v. 1. The second metaphor focuses on the image of Mt. Hermon, that great peak in the far north of the country. Mt. Hermon is often snow-capped, and from springs at its base, the waters that feed the Jordan River come forth. In the image the whole land is seen as being fed by the ‘dew of Hermon’.

How wonderful it is, how pleasant,
for God's people to live together in harmony!

² It is like the precious anointing oil
**running down from Aaron's head and beard,
 down to the collar of his robes.**

³ It is like the dew on Mount Hermon,
falling on the hills of Zion.

That is where the LORD has promised his blessing—
life that never ends.

Romans 11:1-2a, 39-42 (Good News Translation)

This is the third time we dip into Paul's struggle with the objection that his gospel entails betraying his heritage and his nation. We take it up again at the point where he asks whether God has abandoned Israel (11:1). His answer is a resounding: no. But at first his answer is somewhat limited: he is an Israelite (11:1). He means: he has not been abandoned. Jews like himself who have responded to the gospel are a remnant of Israel who have listened to God.

That, however, is only a partial answer. What irks his opponents - and apparently also unsettles Paul - is the notion that all the rest of the Jewish people, could be thought of as abandoned. Paul is not so much thinking legally as ethically. How can God choose people and then write them off? His answer about a remnant is not an adequate answer and he knows it. Nor really is his next argument in 11:11-24, which suggests God has been controlling what had happened, deliberately causing Israel to reject Christ, that is, hardening them, so that the gospel would go to the Gentiles. Paul is scraping the bottom of the barrel. It also gives him a chance to caution Gentiles in Rome not to become arrogant and for that he employs the image of the root stock and the graft. Paul's understanding of God leads him to try such explanations. Paul reaches the climax of his struggle with the issue by asserting hope. He has no idea how - it is "a mystery" - but he insists: all Israel will be saved (11:25-26).

11 I ask, then: Did God reject his own people? Certainly not! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people, whom he chose from the beginning.

²⁹ For God does not change his mind about whom he chooses and blesses. ³⁰ As for you Gentiles, you disobeyed God in the past; but now you have received God's mercy because the Jews were disobedient. ³¹ In the same way, because of the mercy that you have received, the Jews now disobey God, in order that they also may now^[a] receive God's mercy. ³² For God has made all people prisoners of disobedience, so that he might show mercy to them all.

Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28 (Good News Translation)

Today's reading is about boundaries and boundary crossing, about who shall have a place

at the table, a metaphor for the kingdom. Put in another way, who shall be considered acceptable to God. The passage in brackets belongs to a larger section, 15:1-20, in which Matthew revises Mark 7:1-23, but we leave that out here, because of lack of time and space. Instead we concentrate on vs 21-28 alone. The story in Matthew is bears similarities to the earlier version in Mark and is no less painful. In Mark Jesus initially refuses to give his attention to the Gentile woman and her child. Israel are God's children; Gentiles are dogs. While the Greek word could mean 'puppies', it commonly meant dogs and here it is disparaging, hardly affectionate. It is after all ground for refusal, not a sentimental comment about pets. 'Let the children be fed first' (Mark 7:27). This first at least implies there will be something left over for the dogs. In Matthew this first receives fuller explanation: Jesus is not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (15:25). In Matthew she pesters Jesus three times. Jesus' initial response both in Mark and in Matthew is hardly tongue in cheek.

The account portrays Jesus expressing a racist stance only to abandon it when put under pressure. The abandonment of prejudice, the crossing of the traditional boundary, is the good news of the story and why it was told. It is hard not to draw the conclusion that Jesus, himself, had to make a transition, had to learn. His response was more typical of the rather conservative Judaism of the time. Is it embarrassing that Jesus was human, too? Does it make the gospel any less valid if the historical Jesus also had to struggle to come to terms with the negative in his upbringing? At least this is the assumption of the anecdote.

²¹ Jesus left that place and went off to the territory near the cities of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman who lived in that region came to him. "Son of David!" she cried out. "Have mercy on me, sir! My daughter has a demon and is in a terrible condition."

²³ But Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples came to him and begged him, "Send her away! She is following us and making all this noise!"

²⁴ Then Jesus replied, "I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the people of Israel."

²⁵ At this the woman came and fell at his feet. "Help me, sir!" she said.

²⁶ Jesus answered, "It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

²⁷ "That's true, sir," she answered, "but even the dogs eat the leftovers that fall from their masters' table."

²⁸ So Jesus answered her, "You are a woman of great faith! What you want will be done for you." And at that very moment her daughter was healed.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Christ

**Hymn/Song for Meditation: You Raise Me Up (Secret Garden,
 sung by Martin Hurkens) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RojlDwD07I&t=126s>**

Some thoughts....

Let's Give: Our Offerings

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
 praise him, all creatures here below,
 praise him above, ye heavenly host,
 praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

At the end of each prayer/petition the one who prays offers the words; "Jesus, you give all peoples a place at the table", and the response is "that we may follow you, doing the same".

Lord's Prayer

Let us say the Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins,
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Save us from the time of trial
 and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
 now and forever. Amen.***

하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여
 이름이 거룩히 여김을 받으시오며
 나라이 임하옵시며
 뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것 같이
 땅에서도 이루어지이다.
 오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을 주옵시고
 우리가 우리에게
 죄 지은 자를 사하여 준 것 같이
 우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고
 우리를 시험에 들게 하지 마옵시고
 다만 악에서 구하옵소서
 대개 나라와 권세와 영광이
 아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다. 아멘

Closing Hymn: We are marching (TiS 666, Siyahamba, South African-Zulu traditional, tr. Anders Nyberg, Notre Dame University, Folk Choir) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjwvA7ND-L0>

Blessing and Sending Out

The blessing of God almighty,
 the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
 Be upon you and remain with you always

Our service has ended.
 Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

The Lord Bless You and Keep You (John Rutter, Batavia Madrigal Singers) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akT32E83zjI>