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## Coming home?

### Bible Reading: Genesis 46:2-47:12

For ease of reading, we've only including a section of this reading below. However, Claire's reflection refers to details drawn from the whole passage, so why not dig out a Bible and read the whole story?!

God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob.' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'I am God, [a] the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's own hand shall close your eyes.'

Then Jacob set out from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. They also took their livestock and the goods that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Jacob, 'How many are the years of your life?' Jacob said to Pharaoh, 'The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn.' Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed. And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

### Reflection

Christians up and down the land are considering how to return to church buildings and use them for worship safely. This is complex, not only in terms of how to enact all the guidance from government and denominations, not only in setting timescales and expectations, but also in terms of individual responses and needs.

Jacob and his large family made the move of a lifetime, from Canaan to Egypt. Many of the individuals are named in the full Bible passage, including the matriarchs (although not the wives further down the generations). There is a sense that no-one was left behind, that this family may have been complicated, but that every member mattered. Those church leaders trying to plan and manage a return into buildings at the moment are mostly mindful that this move will inevitably fail to include everyone

physically. During lockdown we have seen great creativity and ingenuity in the use of technology to gather worshipping communities, but just as not everyone can Zoom, so not everyone can physically access church buildings.

The return to buildings throws into sharp relief the issues of access and accessibility faced by many people as part of their daily lives. People who cannot hear well need to be able to see faces; those who cannot see well need good lighting and appropriate help in services; those who cannot read need support to navigate wordy liturgy; those who cannot get into church buildings need to be included by their church community.

This period of lockdown has revealed much more about church than the (in)accessibility of our buildings. People who do not normally go into churches have engaged with worship online. They have done so from where they happen to be, wearing what they want to wear, sitting (or lying) where they are, with the knowledge that they can leave at the click of a button or the swipe of a screen. Getting in and out of church is suddenly simple. No-one has judged me for what I wear, or worried about where I sit, or handed me lots of books and leaflets. I've been allowed to bring a coffee, be comfortable, say the responses or not, join in with singing or not, concentrate on every syllable or let it all wash over me, arrive late or leave early, answer doorbells, juggle family, and the only person who has judged is God.

There is a necessary acceptance that in putting worship online people will use it as they choose. This acceptance is, I suggest, largely absent from our physical gatherings, and crucially, it is often absent from the way we do mission. When we introduce one friend to another, we take time and effort and care that both are comfortable. Do we take the same care when we introduce our friends to Jesus?

## **Prayer**

Jesus, I love you and I am thankful that you love me.  
Help me to introduce you, my friend and brother, to my friends.  
Show me how to speak simply about you, in words my friends understand.  
Help me not to judge the ways other people show their love for you,  
Show me how to live and reflect your love into the world.  
Amen.

## **Response**

- Who do you want to ensure isn't lost from your church? What steps will you take to help keep them safe and comfortable?
- What's your favourite lockdown church moment? What made it special? Could it have happened in a church building and if not, is there anything you can learn and apply to returning to a church building?
- What can you do to make going to church physically as unthreatening to a newcomer as engaging online?

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