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ORDINARY 19A

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A short act of worship for use in peoples homes while churches are closed.

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Call to worship

God welcomes you here.

To this place where we gather
this place where we listen
this place where we wonder
this place where we come ready to be changed forever.

God welcomes you here.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

152 STF – This is the day the Lord has made - [YouTube](#)

Opening Prayers

Lord of all faithfulness,
Thank you for never giving up on us
and for always welcoming us home.

We are sorry for the times when our trust in you wavers
when we take our eyes off you
because we are more concerned with ourselves.

Help us to stay oriented towards you
and faithful in all we do.

Amen.

Jesus bringer of hope,
Thank you for giving us a hope that sustains us
and a future with you that we can be sure of.

Thank you for your death and resurrection,
which makes it possible for us to enter into new life.

Help us to live in light of this reality
with gratitude and praise.

Amen.

Gracious Father,
Thank you for your love for our world
your care and imagination in its creation
and your grace and mercy in its redemption.

¹ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Thank you for not abandoning us in our rebellion
but in your Son, making a way possible back to you.

We are grateful for this restored relationship
and the wonderful acceptance we receive.

Amen.²

We now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Matthew 14:22-33

Reflections on the readings:

Biblical translators can generally find respect for bringing clarity and meaning out of texts that were written in languages that relatively few people today are comfortable using. Genesis 37 is a passage that can test that respect. What was traditionally a multi-coloured marvel – the coat of many colours – has more recently been retranslated as ‘a coat with long sleeves’.

Perhaps you find this difficult. It challenges the visually dramatic part of the account, as well as fond memories you may have of trying to list all the colours sung by Jason Donovan, “It was red and yellow and green and brown and scarlet and black and ochre and peach and ruby and olive and violet and fawn...”

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat sounds much more appealing than Joseph and his Baggy Sleeves!

Translators risk provoking a negative reaction over what might seem like an unnecessary technicality that doesn't affect the development of the passage. We like the multi-coloured coat - does it really matter what it looked like? This provocation might help us empathise with the brothers, for whom the presence of the coat is an aggravation, it is a provocative part of Joseph's story. Every time the coat of big sleeves is pushed centre-stage people react. If we are challenged by the ‘coat with long sleeves’ we might find ourselves briefly in the shoes of Joseph's brothers, a place we might not like to be. But to be honest, any of the people in this account might hold an uncomfortable mirror to aspects of our own lives.

In Jacob we see a parent who is prepared to privilege one son over the others, who is blinkered to the way his actions aggravate teenage sibling rivalry.

In Joseph we can see the tactless teenage snitch, who flaunts his father's favouritism, and derives some of his identity in grassing on his brothers.

² Opening prayers written by Claire Welch

In the unnamed brothers is the anonymous assembly, known for their collective voice rather than individual contributions. Here are people that are content to alter their views with changing whims and proposals. They may be named elsewhere, but here all blur into one, where being anonymous helps deflect personal responsibility.

In Judah, who goes along with the jealousy, is the opportunist who proposes a personally profitable option. Why dispose of his brother and be guilty of murder, when the same ends could be reached, minus the guilt of murder or manslaughter, but with a financial reward?

In Reuben, we have a moral voice that falls short. We have someone of conscience but not someone of courage; someone of compromise, but not of conviction. Compared to the other brothers, Reuben stands out as resisting the injustice to Joseph, but compromises on it. Rather than condemning the sin of ending Joseph's life for being a frustrating younger brother, Reuben nevertheless vocally justifies it, suggesting a compromise, where the end result is the same, but the means are different. If we take Reuben as our moral-compass we may well end up adrift, offering self-justification for acts of injustice on the basis that they are not as bad as the alternative. Any of these people can hold an uncomfortable mirror to parts of who we are.

Christ does not call us to be Reubens and Judahs. What Christ does, however, is to challenge us to notice how any of our actions that express hatred, are on the same moral plane as murder.

None of Joseph's brothers are exempted blame from what happens to him; Reuben and Judah are as culpable as the unnamed majority, even if their involvement is different. Neither is Jacob let off the hook, as his actions seem to demonstrate a love that expresses an underlying callousness. Jacob may show actions of love to Joseph, but he does this in such a way that his actions seem to communicate the absence of love to the other brothers. His actions show that discriminating love can be part of the chain of actions that escalate into tragedy and injustice, as much as actively hating someone can. This discriminating love can be as sinful as any of the actions we might normally put in the category of sin. Discriminating love is as far from the kingdom of God as hate is.

To truly love indiscriminately is a high calling, fulfilled only by God, and demonstrated in Jesus. We see something of what it feels like to strive for this perfect love played out in our gospel reading – from Matthew 14. As Jesus calls Peter out onto the water to walk towards him, for a precious few moments, he manages it. But soon, the wind and the fear get to him, and he begins to sink. This is the challenge we must all live with as Christians – seeking to love indiscriminately, as Jesus loves, whilst knowing that we will eventually fall short. But this knowledge must not stop us from making the effort. Will you love, because he first loved us?

One of the messages contained within these passages is the effect that discriminate love, and indiscriminate love can have. Both of these have long lasting effects, being

factors in chains that can ultimately lead to ruptures or restoration, to sorrow or salvation, to hatred or to healing. These passages show the relationship between our human society connections, and our spiritual God-connections, and that we can draw a false distinction between our relationship with other humans and our relationship with God. As God loves us indiscriminately, so does God not only love others around us, but in Jesus God shows us what this looks like and prompts and inspires us to reflect this indiscriminate love. This is part of our salvation and the building of the kingdom of God. A high calling yes, but by the grace of God, may we do this. Let us declare our desire to do this, and be the voices that speak the conscience of God with conviction and be the ones who bring good news.

What do you think about this distinction between indiscriminate or unconditional love, and a love that places requirements or boundaries in the way? Are you able to truly love unconditionally or can only God do that?

[You might like to have a conversation about this – perhaps in small groups, or perhaps by getting in touch with someone else and sharing this reflection and question with them over the phone, online or in a socially-distanced visit!]

God of all grace, show me how to love,
Use me today, to build communities and kingdoms of love,
In Jesus' name.
Amen.³

Prayers of intercession

In the stillness, we bring you all the people who are on our hearts today. Perhaps some of them are close to home. Perhaps some of them are many miles away.

In the quiet, we hold their names and faces in the light of your love.

[Hold a few minutes of quiet. You might like to light a candle or play a calming piece of music to help you focus on your prayers].

Come amongst us, Lord of light, and show us how we can bring your love, your grace, your peace, to your world today. Amen.⁴

Hymn:

662 STF – Have you heard God's voice has your heart been stirred - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

Go then, leave this space,
Knowing God is with you,
Knowing you will be richly blessed,
Knowing that you are called to make a difference,

³ Based on a reflection written by David Lees

⁴ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

Knowing that God will bless others through you,
Knowing the overwhelming love of the living God.

Amen.⁵

⁵ Additional prayers by Tim Baker