

# PENTECOST II

## *Proper 14 - Year A*

*This Bible study was written by Ben Madisson of Virginia Theological Seminary in 2014.*

### **Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28**

**37** Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. <sup>2</sup>These are the descendants 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. <sup>3</sup>Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children because he was the son of his old age, and he made him an ornamented robe. <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>12</sup>Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. <sup>13</sup>And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." <sup>14</sup>So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

He came to Shechem, <sup>15</sup>and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" <sup>16</sup>"I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." <sup>17</sup>The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. <sup>18</sup>They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them they conspired to kill him. <sup>19</sup>They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. <sup>20</sup>Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." <sup>21</sup>But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." <sup>22</sup>Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. <sup>23</sup>So

when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the ornamented robe that he wore, <sup>24</sup>and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

<sup>25</sup>Then they sat down to eat, and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. <sup>26</sup>Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? <sup>27</sup>Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. <sup>28</sup>When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

### **Commentary from Ben Madisson**

Genesis is an origins story. Through Sarah and Abraham, Rebekah and Isaac, and Rachel and Jacob (Israel), God worked and blessed one family – one dynasty – to set aside God’s people on earth. Chapter 37 is the final story of Genesis – that of Joseph recording how the people of Israel would come to Egypt and inevitably be enslaved, leading to the events of Exodus.

Unlike the earlier patriarchal narratives, Joseph’s story is conspicuously lacking any direct intervention, or disclosure, of God’s will or direction. Several times throughout Joseph’s narrative, God’s absence is noticeable, but never more than during the plot to murder Joseph. However, if we look closely, we can see God working throughout the narrative, especially, in this instance, through Reuben, the eldest of the 12 sons of Jacob. While his brothers plot to kill Joseph, Reuben exerts his right as oldest son to change their plans. In verse 22, Reuben demands that his brothers “Shed no blood,” plotting instead to come later and rescue Joseph.

Despite Reuben’s plans, Joseph is still sold into slavery, and the Joseph narrative continues to Egypt. However, Reuben’s act of compassion (whether out of fraternal love, fear, self-interest or expectation) portends Joseph’s words of forgiveness to his brothers in 50:20, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.”

### **Discussion Questions**

Discuss the roles of various parties in this story (Joseph, Jacob, Reuben, the brothers, etc.)

In what ways do you see God working in this story – directly or indirectly?

Have you experienced times of God’s absence? If you have, how did you look for God working in your life?

## Psalm 105, 1-6, 16-22, 45b

- <sup>1</sup> Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name;  
\*make known his deeds among the peoples.
- <sup>2</sup> Sing to him, sing praises to him, \*  
and speak of all his marvelous works.
- <sup>3</sup> Glory in his holy Name; \*  
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord  
rejoice.
- <sup>4</sup> Search for the Lord and his strength; \*  
continually seek his face.
- <sup>5</sup> Remember the marvels he has done, \*  
his wonders and the judgments of his mouth,
- <sup>6</sup> O offspring of Abraham his servant, \*  
O children of Jacob his chosen.
- <sup>16</sup> Then he called for a famine in the land \*  
and destroyed the supply of bread.
- <sup>17</sup> He sent a man before them, \*  
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
- <sup>18</sup> They bruised his feet in fetters; \*  
his neck they put in an iron collar.
- <sup>19</sup> Until his prediction came to pass, \*  
the word of the Lord tested him.
- <sup>20</sup> The king sent and released him; \*  
the ruler of the peoples set him free.
- <sup>21</sup> He set him as a master over his household,  
as a ruler over all his possessions,
- <sup>22</sup> To instruct his princes according to his will  
and to teach his elders wisdom.
- <sup>45b</sup> Hallelujah!

sometimes it is a whitewash and other times it is an unfair representation. However, the writer of the psalm makes the lens clear to us: “That they might keep his statutes/and observe his laws. /Hallelujah!” (verse 45). In short, we give thanks to God because God provides for us in the past, present and future.

### Discussion Questions

Discuss the elements of Psalm 105:16-22 in relation to Gen 37:1-4, 12-28. What is similar or different?

Where in your life have you seen God’s hand?

### Commentary from Ben Madisson

In New Testament studies there is German word – heilsgeschichte – that describes the work of God throughout history; in English, heilsgeschichte translates as “salvation history,” culminating in the redemptive and reconciliatory work of Jesus Christ. However, as Paul shows in Romans, salvation history did not begin with Jesus, but with the dynasties of the Israelite families.

Psalm 105 provides us with a brief and poetic retelling of God’s salvation history for the people of Israel, from Joseph to Cana.

The psalm begins with an exhortation of the work of God (verses 1-6). This psalm of praise clues us into the purpose of the psalm – to thank God for the work God has done, and to be affected by and remember that work. In short, this psalm is a call to remember and a call to respond.

However, what is noticeably absent from the psalm is the disobedience of God’s people – of Joseph’s brothers or the Israelites in the wilderness. All records of history have a lens through which they view past events –

How do you give thanks to God, or respond, when you feel that God is moving and working for your benefit?

## Romans 10:5-15

<sup>5</sup> Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” <sup>6</sup> But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup> “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say?

“The word is near you,  
in your mouth and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim), <sup>9</sup> because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation. <sup>11</sup> The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

<sup>14</sup> But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

### Commentary from Ben Madisson

For centuries, Romans was used by theologians as a “Cliff’s Notes” for theology, gleaning singular theological truths from Paul’s first-century letter to the Jewish Christians in Rome. However, scholarship that is more recent understands that Romans is Paul’s creative reimagining of Jewish salvation history, now completed by the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world.

Chapter 10 of Romans is the last chapter of Paul’s second section of reimagining salvation history. In this section, Paul shows how the salvation history of Israel is completed through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Verses 12-13 are central to this radical inclusion: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’” In this pericope, Paul shows that faith – which in Chapter 4 Paul showed preceded the

Law, because Abraham was justified by his faith prior to the covenant of Moses – eliminates the distinctions that separate Jew and Greek. No longer, says Paul, will some be excluded from God’s plan of salvation; the work of Jesus is for everyone!

### Discussion Questions

Discuss how Paul understands salvation history, and how his narrative is similar to and different from the earlier readings.

In what ways are you, your family or your church living into the truth of Paul’s words that there is no “distinction” between any of us?

## Matthew 14:22-33

<sup>22</sup> Immediately he made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup> And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. <sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

<sup>28</sup> Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." <sup>29</sup> He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" <sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" <sup>32</sup> When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup> And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

### Commentary from Ben Madisson

The writer of Matthew was writing to Jewish Christians and to Jews to help them understand the role of Jesus as the Messiah. In his gospel narrative, Matthew includes many miracles to point to the power and authority of Jesus, God's Son and the Messiah. One such sign, and one of the most well known, appears in today's gospel reading: Jesus walking on the water.

In verse 33, Peter proclaims to Jesus, "Truly you are the Son of God." However, two verses earlier, Peter doubts the power of Jesus, and fails to walk on water. How are we to understand the role that Jesus plays in our lives and his power to reconcile us to God if even the disciples doubted Jesus' authority?

The most important thing to glean from this story comes from verse 28. When Peter sees Jesus, he is so inspired and moved by his power that he asks Jesus to let him participate in the miracle. As the other verses have shown, God's plan for humanity is a long one, but

God is always there to provide. What the story of Jesus walking on the water does is remind us that we are a part of salvation history. We are not passive participants in the work of God, but we are active co-creators, bringing about the Kingdom and will of God on earth. We are Peter; we want to walk on the water with Jesus.

### Discussion Questions

How do you see this passage illuminating the person and work of Jesus?

Have you ever doubted? How were you able to find faith in times of doubt?

How will you participate in salvation history?