

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 9<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

**Reflection**

*Jane Quarmby, Reader*

Jealousy is not an attractive emotion. The green-eyed monster is a destructive force if not controlled, leading to marriage and family breakdowns. Envy is one of the things forbidden in the ten commandments. It's not just people – we see it with our puppy who pushes the older, gentle dogs away if they are being stroked. She gets told off but takes not a blind bit of notice.

It can take a more sinister turn though than our jealous puppy. For Joseph, the much-loved youngest son of Jacob and his favourite wife Rachel, it nearly led to his murder by his half-brothers. It makes me wonder about this business of parents having favourites - it causes problems in the closest of families. It's often the youngest who is the favourite, the one born to older parents, who have been strict with the older children but now over-indulge the youngest. Not unnaturally, the older children very often resent this. It can split families – and it doesn't help matters when the patriarch makes it plain by the gift of the beautiful robe that he isn't going to leave his inheritance fairly split between his children.

I can't help wondering what Jacob was thinking of, letting this young lad go and work for his half-brothers who seem to be a wild bunch, not averse to murder. Joseph dutifully trotted off to do as his father wanted but it does seem that Jacob should have had more sense. Our reading this morning misses out the dreams that Joseph had of reigning over his brothers, but I doubt very much if these endeared him to them. And so they plot to kill him. It isn't a pretty story, emphasizing how jealousy leads to hatred and to men being consumed by evil. Only Reuben, the eldest, redeems himself by saving the boy's life, planning secretly to come back and

rescue him. But the whole thing gets out of hand and Joseph ends up being sold as a slave.

Throughout this we see the contrast between Joseph, the dutiful son, the honest and faithful one, and his brothers, eaten up with anger and envy, leading them to commit grave crimes. We can see why they weren't chosen to be leaders by God. God doesn't choose leaders based on who can talk a good talk, or lead men into battle, or any of the things that men over the centuries have valued. God chooses people for his own reasons to be leaders of his people, his church. And very often God does not explain.

That's one of the most annoying things, I find - that we must trust in God and follow him without being told what the plan is beforehand. Just a hint would help sometimes!

But time and again we are reminded that God does have a plan, and it works. Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt, and it all works out well in the end as he rises to power in this foreign country and saves his own people (and his brothers) when famine strikes. He remains faithful to God in all that happens to him, through the ups and downs. He is put in charge of all of Pharaoh's administration, then is falsely imprisoned but becomes the warden's favourite and is put in charge of the prison. His skill at interpreting dreams gets him out of prison and Pharaoh again puts him in charge of all Egypt. He is a wise administrator and puts by food to get the country through a long famine. When famine strikes, not only the Egyptians have cause to thank him, but people from all around Egypt come to buy grain from him. Including Joseph's elder brothers. They don't recognize Joseph, but he recognizes them. And far from being angry with them, he is happy to see them and helps them, eventually bringing them, their families, and his father to Egypt, where they settled and were prosperous. Joseph ends the long trail of brotherly envy and violence which began with Cain and Abel, and the brothers are reconciled. Joseph tells them right at the end of the book of Genesis "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so that I could save the lives of many people." Such faith! Such trust in God even in difficult times.

Faith is hard to grasp sometimes but we have another graphic picture of what faith can do in Matthew's account of Jesus walking on the water, which is amazing enough to convert anyone, but for me the sharpest picture is of Peter. He's

impulsive, enthusiastic, and so very human. I'm not sure what I'd have done seeing my friend walking over the waves to me, but I doubt if I'd have hopped over the side and tried walking towards him. But that's what Peter did – and his faith is overwhelmed when he sees the waves and the wind and so he starts to sink. I wonder if there was a streak of envy in Peter – if his friend could walk on water, why couldn't he? It's hard to have a friend who is better at everything than you, who can do marvelous things that you can't. He gets a mild rebuke, but Jesus reaches out and grabs him. It's so easy, when we too are overwhelmed by life's strong winds and waves, to lose faith in Jesus. We focus on the difficulties and try to solve them our way. Much easier to have a friend who can reach out and grab us, to stop us sinking. But when someone reaches out their hand to save us, we do need to accept it.

There's an old joke about a man who fell off a cliff, and on his way down, prayed hard to God to save him. He managed to grab hold of a rock and cling on for dear life, all the while praying to God to save him. Someone sees him fall, and throws him a rope, but the man refuses. His faith is strong, he will wait for God. The coastguard arrives in a boat underneath him, ready to fish him out of the sea if he would just let go and jump. He refuses, his faith is strong, he's waiting for God to rescue him. Finally, a helicopter arrives and winches down a man to rescue him. But again he refuses, still hanging on and waiting for God to rescue him. Eventually his strength gives out and he falls to his death. When he arrives in heaven, he's angry with God for not saving him. And God replies: My son, I sent a man with a rope, I sent the coastguard, and I sent the helicopter rescue. You refused them all. You didn't see my hand in anything I did for you.

God loves us all, his only son gave his life for us. Instead of looking around and seeing what others have, or can do, let's look at what God has done for us as individuals. We may not understand his plans, life may seem unfair, but we still need to trust that God is taking care of us and has it all worked out for us.

I began with Petra, our puppy. She gets very excited every time I get the car keys out because that means we are going out somewhere. Sometimes it ends in a long walk which she loves. Sometimes we only go to the bins. But either way, she's content just to be part of the trip. There's a lesson there for me.