

Sunday Thought

20th February 2022 Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Genesis 45: 3 – 11, 15

Psalm 37: 1 – 11, 39 – 40

1 Corinthians 15: 35 – 38, 42 – 50

Luke 6: 17 – 38

Where Now, Lord ?



Among the most dramatic, tear-jerking moments in scripture is today's Old Testament account of Joseph meeting his brothers. *'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?'* The brothers' speechless terror is easily understood. They are in the presence of the most powerful man in Egypt – the man they tried to murder, sold into slavery, unwittingly condemned to service, abuse

and false imprisonment. However, in what may be described as an amazing act of grace – even a foretaste of the gospel – Joseph says to them, *'I'm your brother. There's no need to be afraid. I don't blame you. All that has happened has been God going ahead of you to save our family and nation from destruction through starvation. I will give you provisions and a new land in Goshen to make your home.'* Generations later their descendents, streamed out of Goshen to discover that through many more trials and much suffering, God was going ahead of them to his Promised Land. Egypt had been just a pause on an eternal journey! There were no signposts and I imagine Moses asking a question which I have often used as a prayer – *'Where are we going now, Lord?'*

Last week I received a very welcome phone call from a dear friend who told me about another mutual friend who was experiencing the suffering and loss of younger family members. *'I feel I want to shout at God!'* she told me. I understood. I have been in that place myself and believe God is well used to the shouting, but I am learning to lower my voice and ask, *'Where now, Lord? Where are you taking us with this one?'* I am reminded of the seventeenth century mystic, Margaret Mary Alacoque who wrote, *My Saviour promised he would never fail to take care of me – except when I insisted on meddling in my own affairs. When I find my plans upset, He says 'Let Me do it. Leave it to Me!'*

In our gospel reading, Luke speaks of the Spirit's power going out from Jesus – the atmosphere was charged with God's presence. In the synagogues his words had the same effect. It was a touch of heaven embracing people with happy life-changing experiences of physical, moral and spiritual healing. Jesus then turned to his disciples and said, *How happy you are to be seeing the Kingdom of God in action. You recognise it because His Kingdom is in you. You may not think so when following me means you go hungry and your compassion for a suffering world breaks your heart. You may not be singing happy songs when following me means a different way of life which invites others to hate and reject you, but be happy because the Kingdom of heaven is in you. This 'up-side-down' way is a prelude to an even more wonderful life when you will no longer have to ask 'Where now?' You will have arrived!*

A similar image may be drawn from Paul's words to Christians at Corinth today. Members of that church had been thinking about death, rising with Christ and the afterlife. Paul uses the simplest of illustrations – they're the best lessons, as Jesus knew. He talks about a seed. Think of this earthly life and body as a seed – yes it does get a bit shrivelled when the planting is late! but it is destined to die – that is God's purpose for his creation. However, in the seed are all the same genes and elements which will come alive again in a beautiful springtime glory. Even the mighty oak tree is all inside a long-dropped acorn! This all emphasises the importance of our living and sharing the Kingdom. All those Kingdom-genes which through the Spirit are living and developing in this earthly seed, - my personal Kingdom dna - hold the promise of a beautiful Christlike future life in that dimension we call heaven. All the spirit-filled bits of this old body will springtime into a spectacular form of heavenly beauty! Even now heaven has begun. We are on the way. *'Where now, Lord?'* Maybe in heaven we shall hear loved ones using Joseph's words to his brothers. *'It was God who sent us ahead for you!'*

A Prayer for today (with Psalm 37 in mind)

Lord, each day I am troubled by threats of war,
stories of rampant disease,
pictures of corrupt national leaders,
and heart-wrenching news of homeless, hungry children.
Sometimes, it all makes me so angry with prosperous, wicked people,
and occasionally with you too Lord, when it's hard to understand you.

Help me to trust that you are always going ahead
to prepare a new world
based on Heaven's Kingdom principles.

I will seek my happiness in loving you.
I will trust you to prepare and lead me step by step along your way.
I will wait and work patiently for your Kingdom in me and through me.
I will ask quietly, *'Where are we going now with this, Lord?'*

