

Gen 45:3-11, 15; Psalm 37:1-11, 40-41; 1 Cor 15:35-50; Luke 6: 27-38

Father God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Our readings this week illustrate the extravagance of God's love; his abundant generosity that flows from his purpose. There is nothing we can do to gain his love and nothing we have done that will exclude us from his love. Jesus continually demonstrates this unabandoned love for us throughout the gospel, and as God's children, this is the example God expects us to follow, in our daily lives.

When we read Joseph's story: his abduction, incarceration, abandonment, by his brothers, his slavers, his prison companions, we would expect him to become a bitter man. Yet his faith and his faithfulness to follow God's purpose, using the gift of interpretation of dreams God bestowed on him, and the patience of a saint, resulted in him becoming second only to Pharaoh, and overseer of Egypt, during a seven year harvest boom and a seven year drought.

The meeting between him, in his new position, and his guilt-ridden brothers who were in desperate need physically and spiritually, could have been an opportunity to laud it over them, to pay them back for the cruel way they had treated him. Many people would, in Joseph's position.

Our media today is full of stories of people taking or demanding payback for some wrong or perceived wrong that has transpired. On our roads there are instances of road rage when someone cuts a lane or overtakes or drives slower than the speed limit. While waiting in line for an event someone may cut ahead of you, or let someone in, and you may feel slighted. We live in a stressful society where everything moves very fast, and people's patience is thin; we need God's peace and his generosity of spirit.

This is what our psalmist speaks about, waiting on the Lord, not letting anger control us, committing our way to the Lord, trusting him, and letting him act, in his perfect timing. This is what we see illustrated in Joseph's story.

When he meets with his brothers he is filled with compassion, not anger. He sees the fear in their eyes when they recognise him, fear of what he might do to them now that he is in a position of power. But instead Joseph looks on them with love; he wants to reconnect, he asks about his father and he reassures them.

This is how some people see God today, a God of judgement, one who punishes them for what they have done, are doing or will do. Perhaps they have come from a family that demonstrated this practise, or they have experienced it in school or in society in general. They have only known fear and punishment; they have never experienced love, unmerited love, the extravagant love of a loving heavenly Father. We know God's forgiveness and we are to demonstrate this to others.

As our psalmist says we are to keep away from the ungodly, which means that we do not join them in their sin, but it does not mean that we avoid them, judge them, or punish them. We are to love them, with God's love. Love them without expecting anything in return, which means that they will probably reject us, revile us, abuse us. If this is the response you receive, shake it off and move away. There will be others that God places in your path for you to demonstrate God's love.

God has called us here to be his church, to demonstrate his love to the people in this community. He has generously provided our needs and bestowed wealth on us in the form of extra food, clothing, finance and time that we are to offer to others in need. This may mean donating to the Op Shop or perhaps volunteering there. It is an excellent opportunity to connect with people, greet them with a smile, enquire about their health, take the time to chat, listen to their stories. Perhaps you feel the call to pastoral care, visiting people in their homes, in hospice, in prison. Maybe there are community organisations you can join with, who already have programs in place.

You do not need to be rich to give. Jesus promises that what we give we will receive back with reckless abandon. A measure that is pressed down, shaken and running over. Think of it this way, a woman goes to the market for some grain. She has a small bag as she can only afford a small amount. The store holder starts to measure out the grain into her bag on the scales, but then he presses the grain down to remove the large air pockets, then he shakes the bag until the grain settles and then he continues to fill the bag until it is overflowing. This is an image of God's great love.

We offer what we have, and God returns it in abundance. This is why we tithe, we give our monetary gifts to God, and then give a little more, because we experience God's generosity.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, speaks about what is sown and what is reaped. When we sow sparingly, in our church, in our community, we will reap sparingly. We cannot expect growth in the church if we are not prepared to share our faith, our gifts, our time with those God places in our path. We cannot expect reconciliation if we are not prepared to love people with God's love, to forgive them, to pray for them, to reach out and connect with them.

Our reward will not be fleeting like accolades or monetary compensation, our reward, when we are obedient, will be a heavenly one. Jesus says that our reward will be great, it will be imperishable; we will be deemed children of the Most High. Our reward will be when we are welcomed home by Jesus, and we will hear the words, 'well done good and faithful servant, come on in'.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.