

August 16th 2026

11th Sunday after Trinity

**10.30am Holy Communion and baptism at All Saints
Oakham**

Genesis 45.1-15, Romans 11.1-2, 29-32, Matthew 15.21-28

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

I have to admit that when I first looked at the lessons that are set for today my heart sank more than a little. I was really hoping for something that seemed to be suitable for a baptism, but on the surface the three readings that we have just had don't seem to offer much that is really relevant to a baptism at all, and I was strongly tempted to jettison them and choose something more suitable. But after some reflection, it did begin to dawn on me that the three readings, taken together, are saying things that are important both for a baptism and for the life of All Saints in general.

First though I need to stress the readings aren't in anyway related to each other around a common theme. Our Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel readings are each portions of books that we have been reading sequentially over the last few months. But, as so often, scripture casts light on other scripture in odd ways, and so it is with the readings today.

But first, what are the readings about? I will look at them in chronological order – the Old Testament first with a story from around 1200BC, then the gospel from around 30AD, then Paul's letter from about 25 years after the gospel events.

The Old Testament is a continuation of the story of Joseph. Last week we heard how Joseph's siblings sold their frankly obnoxious younger brother into slavery. Today's reading tells of events many years afterwards, when Joseph had risen to high office in Egypt, after many trials and tribulations including the incident with Potiphar's wife. He had prepared Egypt to withstand a famine that affected the whole of the eastern Mediterranean area, including Israel. His brothers were sent by their father Jacob to buy grain from Egypt. They didn't recognise Joseph, but on recognising his brothers, Joseph tested them in a number of ways. Today's reading is the end of the story, where he reveals himself to his brothers. At first they were horrified, but very gradually, as they finally realised what was going on, the process of reconciliation could begin.

The gospel reading is the well known story of Jesus's interaction with a Canaanite woman. He was still trying to find a place of rest after the assassination of John the Baptist, but was, as recorded in the events leading up to today's reading, surrounded by crowds wanting to see and hear him, to see if he would perform any miracles. In the reading he

was a long way north, in what we now call Lebanon when this incident occurred. It is quite a complex little story, and I'm not going to attempt to unpack it to any extent, but we see a sharp conversation between Jesus and the woman over who Jesus had come to minister to, just the Jews or others as well? Indeed some would see it as almost a rhetorical competition between the two of them, with Jesus's uncomfortable reference to the woman as a "dog", but in the end Jesus healed the woman's daughter as she wished. And in this reading we see one of a number of hints in the gospel that ultimately Jesus came not just to bring salvation to those acceptable to Jewish polite society, but to those outside it – in this case a foreign, unclean gentile woman'

Finally the reading from Romans, comes in the middle of a passage where Paul almost seems to be arguing with himself. After he had concluded a long discussion with the fact that God, through Jesus, had made it possible for gentiles, non-Jews, to become his children, part of the church, and having accepted that the majority of the Jews, his people, had rejected Jesus as their Messiah, he goes on to ask if God has indeed rejected his people. And his answer is a firm *No*, that they too will be shown the same mercy as the gentiles to whom Paul is writing. So we have here a very personal reflection as he struggles with the implications of his own arguments.

So then, what do these lessons say to us this morning, and how are they relevant to the rather difficult situation we find ourselves in as a church in the ever extending interregnum, and more specifically what are they saying to Arav, Shan and Hana and to the rest of us at this baptism service. There are two major points I think.

Firstly I think they tell us that our timescales are not necessarily God's timescales and his plans can take a long time to work out. For Joseph and his brothers, it was many years between when Joseph was sold into slavery and when he met his brothers again, years in which God's plan had been being revealed. Joseph realised this and said

God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

For the early church the realisation that Jesus came to save Gentiles as well as Jews, took many decades to work out as the apostles came to realise the implications of the gospel. For them to realise that

.... even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.....

And for Paul, he was convinced that one day his people would come to God through Jesus, but he had no idea when that might be – decades or centuries into the future, He wrote

for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

And this is the first point I think we can get from today's readings. The God has a plan for his church and for each one of us that extends far beyond our immediate concerns. What

that plan might be for All Saints, I have no idea, but hopefully it won't involve a decades long interregnum. Similarly I have no idea what God's plan might be for Arav, Shan and Hana, but I do know that the baptism today is for them the next part of their journey with Jesus as his plan for their lives unfolds.

But there is I think another point that arises from considering our three readings as a whole. In the Old Testament reading, we see the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers being worked out.

Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

This conversation couldn't have been easy given all the baggage between them. And that is in itself a lesson to us – to seek the hard road of reconciliation with others with whom we have clashed. But the story has also been seen by both Jewish and Christian commentators as a picture of the reconciliation between God and man, God welcoming his children back into his presence. A picture of his mercy and his compassion.

From the gospel, we see again this same mercy and compassion, not just restricted to a particular gender, or a particular race or nation

'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

And for Paul, in his puzzlement, he realised that God's mercy and faithfulness extends even to those who have rejected him

For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

So the second point that comes to me from these reading – that whatever situation we find ourselves in, whatever pit we find ourselves at the bottom of, Jesus is there with us, showing us God's mercy, his compassion, his faithfulness, his love, calling us to reconciliation, back into his presence. And that certainly applies to us as a church at this difficult time. But it also applies to the three of us who will be baptised today. Arav, Shan, Hana – wherever you go, whatever you do, Jesus will be walking with you, loving you, forgiving you, always welcoming you back from wherever you wonder.

I end with some words that we sang earlier

*There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.*

For the love of God is broader

*than the measure of our mind,
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.*

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