

Sentence

The disciples cried out in fear, but Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart; it is I; do not be afraid.'

Matthew 14:26-5

Collect

God and Ruler of all creation, give new strength to our faith that we may recognize Your presence even when all hope seems lost. Help us to face all trials with serenity as we walk with Christ through the storms of life, and come at last to Your eternal peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen

Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 37: 1 – 4 & 12 – 28

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family 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. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. 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.

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 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." 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, and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." 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.

They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 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." But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." 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.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. 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. Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 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.

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.

Psalm

105: 1 – 6 & 16 – 22

O give thanks to the Lord and call upon His Name: tell among the peoples what things He has done

Sing to Him, O sing praises: and be telling of all His marvellous works

Exult in His holy Name: and let those who seek the Lord be joyful in heart

Seek the Lord and His strength: O seek His face continually

Call to mind what wonders He has done: His marvellous acts and the judgements of His mouth

O Seed of Abraham His servant: O children of Jacob, His chosen one

Then He called down a famine on the land: and destroyed the bread that was their stay

But He also sent a man ahead of them: Joseph who was sold into slavery

Whose feet they fastened with fetters: and thrust his neck into a hoop of iron

Till the time that his words proved true: he was tested by the Lord's command

Then the king sent and loosed him: the ruler of nations set him free

He made him master of his household and ruler over all his possessions

To rebuke his officers at will: and to teach his counsellors wisdom

Epistle

Romans 10: 4 – 15

Christ is the end¹ of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." 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) "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." 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." 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? 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!"

GOSPEL

Matthew 14: 22 – 36

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. After the people of that place recognized him, they sent word throughout the region and brought all who were sick to him, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

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NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

Recent re-translations have slightly mucked up Andrew Lloyd-Webber's lyrics when the change from 'coat of many colours' changed to 'long robe with sleeves.' How the understanding of Hebrew could have altered so much escapes me I must confess. However, whatever the nature of the garment it really riled the elder brothers to have this somewhat excessive young bloke fawned upon by an ageing father. Mind you, Joseph had shown himself to be somewhat of a twit well before all this.

It may sound somewhat obsessive to have the outcome of the story really happen, but on the other hand, some Mediterranean cultures can be excessive on occasion. So Joseph was sold as a slave to passing Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt and doubtless made a quid out of the exchange. (Ishmaelites were not-too-distant relatives if the truth is known.)

The point of the story takes a long time to relate, as you will doubtless know. And it was Joseph who – after a series of rather dramatic and really quite savage episodes, matured into a very capable young man. It was he who recognized the hand of God through all the turmoil and the eventual outcome, realizing that had all that *not* happened, the saga of the Abrahamic clan may not have survived even those first few generations. Our God has a

¹ Greek renders telos, goal not 'end!'

habit of knowing what He is doing, and rescuing His people from all manner of dire situations. It is well worth remembering that!

Psalm

And many years later, this Psalmist did remember what had happened, and rejoiced at the outcome.

Epistle

In his usual way the Apostle goes off into a wide-ranging discussion of the Gospel, and its ramifications. I have to say that, in terms of modern theology, Paul does not make a strong case for what he is trying to establish. But the real point is that people need to hear the Gospel, either by word or by action, and that there are no barriers, racial, religious or otherwise, to the capacity to hear and respond to the truth.

(When Paul wrote of Jesus being ‘the end of the Law’ he was not indicating ‘finish’ – the Greek word is *telos* - *τελος* – and that means goal. Where the Law was heading.

GOSPEL

This story of Jesus walking on water is often referred to by those who wish to discredit the Faith. Such argument is hardly useful to advance such claims, for the actual historical reality may well have been rather different. The closer Jesus came to the climax of His ministry, the more obvious it was that the *denouement* would be climactic. It is one thing to be ‘religious.’ It is another to be really very radical. Storms in real life lay ahead, and Jesus was painfully aware of the lack of capacity of the Twelve to cope with it.

So this is more a learning curve thing than a miracle. (Jesus never used miracle for any other reason than to get a strong message across, a lesson that stuck in the minds of the disciples.

First of all, water to Hebrews, produced somewhat mixed emotions. In a dry land, water was precious for life to be maintained. But, when it came to crossing the sea – or for seas in general – that sort of water was regarded as a huge threat. In spite of that Jonah tried to escape, remember. After Exodus, the sea was always seen as symbolic of evil. And that ‘sea of glass’ before the throne of God in Revelation represents the sum total of human evil. *And that might be something of a shock. Always be aware of when symbol is used to express something of real significance.*

NOTES FOR A SERMON

It is a little late now, but some years ago when last Sunday’s Gospel was the reading for the day, I was in a parish new to me, and – as usual - wanting people to move past their comfort zones, *and think*. The Feeding Sign was it, and I dared to ask people to move beyond the mere miracle of it all. I was met with shocked silence.

Taking them further, I asked who else had the People of Israel up mountains, and fed rather unusually, and a blank silence again was followed by a very quiet ‘Moses?’ answer from among the tiny group gathered. Great start. Then I asked did anyone note any difference between the outcome when Moses was in charge as compared to when Jesus was it? And pennies began to drop.

Someone noticed that when Jesus was running the show, there was almost more left over than when it all started. So I asked what was the Gospel writer wanting to convey to us from his report of the event? And that began to get some grey matter moving, as people saw that the point was not **miracle**, but rather to look and see if or not Jesus’ capacity to offer real change was more effective than His ancient predecessor. *And that answer was really quite immediate.*

So if you stuck with ‘wacko, look what Jesus can do’ in terms of filling bellies, then you have missed the point entirely.

Whenever there is a kerfuffle from the more atheist people among us, there is usually fetid remarks about the stilling of the storm or of Jesus walking on water, and the pathetic nature of people who believe in miracles. I suspect it is meant to be a ‘put off’ for anyone stupid enough to consider joining the ranks of Christian believers, warning such that one of the requirements of such a move is to commit intellectual suicide. On the other hand, I find – from my side of the fence – that to ask people to think more usually results in a determination to refuse to move.

The sad thing about all that is that our Lord Himself was quite clear about His use of miracle. In the Temptation narrative, it is quite clear He refused such a path to obtain a following of people. Jumping from pinnacles of Temples was no way to discipleship-raising. In his Gospel, John makes clear that ‘miracle’ is not used either: it is *sign*, *σημειον* – *semaion*. That means the signs were something to give people room to move to

consider, to understand what is being said *via* such signals. Such thinking meant that one had to dredge one's memory of Biblical narrative and tale and story, to catch clear sight of what was being offered.

And today's Gospel is no different at all. And the vast array of Biblical imagery is to be brought to the fore to catch sight of all that was being conveyed.

Mountains and seas do not require a lot of pondering to get all this into gear. Moses' stories almost rear up in one's head, do they not? Sinai and Re(e)d Sea, and escape from danger because one is led by God. Even Peter's fumbling attempt to be in control gets the thumbs down from Jesus, for who did he think he was? It is God Who rescues, not Peter.

So it has a lot less to do with miracle, and a lot more to do with getting things into focus. And trusting Him Whom you should be trusting, and not your own rather limited abilities to succeed.

It is often not all that clearly understood that the Gospels were not written until quite some time after the Resurrection of Jesus. I don't mean years; I mean decades. Up to that point, all believers had expected, in line with contemporary teaching by the Apostles, that Jesus would be returning to bring it all to an end probably in those people's own lifetimes. The passage of time (and doesn't 't move quickly when you are having fun?) got people realising that if Jesus did NOT appear soon, then someone needed to commit all they remembered to writing for the sake of however many years, decades or generations that would pass before He did.

By that time, too, of course, the Infant Church had stopped being a tiny little nuisance to authorities, Jewish or Roman, to being quite somewhat of a thorn in the side of both of those parties. With that arising, pressure mounted on the Church either to disappear, or conform or get pressure mounted on to them to be eliminated. Now it is not the nicest of possibilities to become heroes and martyrs, so life was becoming really quite difficult. As with most Empires and Caesars, the threat to their authority was met with pathological – even megalomaniacal! – wrath. It was bad enough for Christians who were not Roman citizens, because their livelihood was taken away anyhow. How was it for Christians in Soviet Russia, or even Hitler's Germany? Worse still, you all know what it was like for Jews, amongst others.

So this incident in the life of the disciples – as in today's Gospel – came to offer far more significant encouragement to then modern Christians, for it was a signal reminder that it was not Peter, Bishop of Rome, who had the answers, but Jesus Himself. He was in the storm with them, and He it was Who would lead them through and out of it. *And nothing else mattered.* There was no easy path of rose-petals offered. It was head down, tail up be involved in normal human events, and have even your own loyalty tested. This Jesus of ours never did muck around; but you know He was right there with you, in the middle of all the drama and angst.

It was around that time that Caesars showed up to be particularly nasty pieces of work. None of them were saints, but some were outright devilish, mad, bonkers. And Nero was not one of the worst.

We Aussies are remarkably fortunate (or is that really a statement that we not quite up to such a struggle?) that we have never been under those sorts of pressures. Sure, we get a lot of stupid remarks or letters to the editor of papers – some of which are not all that far from the truth. But who has ever been threatened with prison or execution for their faith? Certainly we have had those New Guinea martyrs who refused to flee home when the Japanese invaded, stayed at their missionary posts, and some paid for that with their lives. But not too many in our congregations have been threatened. Thank heaven for that, for there is no promise that we shall always have such protection.

So – whether it becomes an issue for us or not, quietly take notice of what this passage puts in front of us. We are God's people, but we live in a world that, increasingly, turns its back on God, and on truth and justice and compassion.

Sentence

Maintain justice and do what is right, for soon My salvation will come and My deliverance be revealed.

Isaiah 56:1

Collect

Almighty God, You have given Your only Son to be for us both a sacrifice for sin and also an example of godly life; give us grace that we may always thankfully receive the benefits of His sacrifice, and also daily endeavour to follow the blessed steps of His most holy life, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 43: 1 – 15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. 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. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there--since there are five more years of famine to come--so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honoured in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." 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.

Psalm

133

Behold how good and lovely it is: when families live together in unity
It is fragrant as oil upon the head: that runs down to the beard: fragrant as oil upon the beard of Aaron, that ran down over the collar of his robe
It is like the dew of Hermon: like the dew that falls upon the hill of Zion.
For there the Lord commanded His blessing: which is life for evermore.

Epistle

Romans 11: 13 – 32

I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.

You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back

into their own olive tree. So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, "Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob." "And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

GOSPEL

Matthew 15: 21 – 28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

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NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

This culmination of the long-running tale about Joseph has a rather lovely ending, as perhaps both the brothers and Joseph had enough time to ponder the outcomes. The wisdom and care of Joseph is remarkable, but certainly, Joseph must have been a priggish kid, partly due to doting parents. (Never mistake doting for love! They are too very different things.)

In the providence of God, the small Abrahamic tribe was enabled to survive, which is the repetitive story of Israel. Mind you, as time went by, this was the start of another difficult time as *there arose a king who knew not Joseph* as the old King James Version translated the story.

Psalm

Once in my lifetime have I heard a sermon based on this psalm, and it was Don Robbie, later Archbishop of Sydney, who gave it to us in my College years. This brief passage is a panegyric on the value of unity in a family, the working, living and loving together, which tends to be increasingly lost in this day and age of individualism. If you do not get the impact of 'dew' then you must live indoors rather too much to notice. Try going out early one morning. Refreshment is almost tangible.

Epistle

Again I would have to say that modern Biblical scholars and theologians are likely to use Scripture in the same way to reach the *telos* that Paul did. That poor man seemed to be torn between retaining value for the original People of God, and yet acknowledging their rather odd response to Christ. However, he was aware that God's call remains for whoever chooses to respond, Jew or Goyim. Basically he was making sure that no one dared to lord it over Jewish people; and a huge pity it has been that often that charge is rarely responded to.

GOSPEL

And yet there is ever the conundrum; and do not miss this point either. Jesus seemed to have another 'spin' on the interracial issues. Always read the fine print. If you are unfamiliar with the map of the Holy Land, it would be worth finding one and pinpointing where mentioned places are situated. Here is a case in point.

You might be surprised at the number of times Jesus went outside the borders of Israel, where you can be sure that Gentiles were encountered. You might also detect where Samaria was, for that too was somewhat 'outside' real Israel. At the time of the collapse of the Northern Kingdom, people from the north were introduced, as was victors' wont, to control the now-conquered peoples. As time passed, people of mixed race and blood were

born, Samaritans being some of those. These were despised by 'real' Jewish people, yet they retained some of the Hebrew faith.

Anyhow, Tyre and Sidon were further 'outside' than Samaria, so were complete gentiles. And that was the issue here. This *Canaanite woman* was entirely beyond the pale as far as Jews were concerned, and was almost subhuman. No self-respecting Jew – male in particular! – would enter into any conversation with such a one. And yet Jesus turned this incident into a very steep learning curve for the disciples. They expected Jesus to treat the lady with utter disdain; in fact that was what they wanted and expected. So when Jesus was really quite rude to her, the disciples would have applauded, if secretly. That business about children's bread being given to the dogs was – quite honestly – insulting. Mind you, that woman may well have expected something far worse. However, the jibe was directed, not at the woman, **but at the expectation of the Twelve**. Our Lord put them in a bind they did not see until too late, one suspects. On the one hand, there was that **Gentile** woman mendicant asking for help from Someone she recognized as Son of David. In other words, she knew Who He was. That implied a clear perception of Jesus, a clear statement of faith – better, understanding if you will. It was a sort of two-edged sword in a way; one aspect of the case seemed to be overcome by the other. It was an approach that Jesus used on more than one occasion, and He used it to somehow force His team to see way beyond their bigotry.

So Jesus was not going to let the Twelve off lightly, although He was far more compassionate to the woman who 'should have been' ignored if contemporary Jewish attitudes were to be followed. 'Woman, great is your faith!' bore tribute to the love she had for her child, the persistence she had against contrary pressure, and her patience in coping with then typical Jewish rudeness. 'Great is your everything' would you not say?

This Jesus of ours puts us in all manner of awkward situations as He raises issues that we should have dealt with long ago. We Christians have been so remarkably slow to respond to NT challenges about women, about slavery, about ingrained attitudes that reflect very poorly on our own discipleship and faith. Christianity is not about being orthodox – for Jesus was certainly not that. It is not about being conservative – nor was He along those lines. It is about being open and honest, accepting people – particularly those on the edges – and putting our arms around them to provide room for them to move forward.

It is a risky business, but then it always was so.

Sentence

Martha said to Jesus, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, the One Who is coming into the world.’

John 11: 27

Collect

Creator God, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You: teach us to offer ourselves to Your service, that here we may have Your peace, and in the world to come, may see You face to face, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Old Testament Lesson

Exodus 1: 8 - 2:10

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labour. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labour. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birth-stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live. Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?"

Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Psalm

124

If the Lord has not been on our side, now may Israel say: if the Lord had not been on our side, when our enemies rose against us

Then they would have swallowed us alive: when their anger was kindled against us.

Then the waters would have overwhelmed us and the torrents gone over us: the raging waters would have gone clean over us

But praised be the Lord: Who has not given us as a prey to their teeth

We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler: the snare is broken and we have gone free

Our help is in the Name of the Lord: Who has made heaven and earth

Epistle

Romans 12: 1 – 8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

GOSPEL

Matthew 16: 13 – 20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

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NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

This must be one of the best-known passages in the entire Old Testament, unless younger people had no access to Sunday School lessons. The lousy outcome for Israel, so many decades after Joseph must have felt like the end of bliss. The increasingly bitter pressure exerted by Egyptians over the Hebrew people must have been met with a sombre response, and yet there were those who faith – and refusal to kow-tow remained steadfast. (That is a real test of faith: all hope seemed to be ebbing away, but there remained those who would not bow the knee. That takes some doing let me tell you.)

The resistance offered resulted in a rather unexpected outcome, as the subsequent story of Moses and his life unfolded. That Moses was brought up as a prince meant that he had access to all manner of education and experience, which would have been most useful in his later life and leadership. Thank God for quiet, simple faithful people ... of all sorts.

Psalm

And does this psalm fit the bill today or does it fit the bill? Would you please note the parallel seen between water and danger to life. This is a pattern that continues right through Biblical history. And so does the conviction, borne out of long experience, that God is a God Who rescues His people from all manner of tight corners.

Epistle

Romans 12 had long been a very favourite passage for me, and one that speaks of a clear and determined direction to travel in life. The word translated 'worship' is also just as easily translated 'service' – yet not a lot of people connect what happens on Sundays with service although we may well call it that. Worship is something that I will widen out a little in sermon notes probably, in the hope it is more helpful. Neither worship nor service were ever meant to be 'entertainment.'

GOSPEL

Lots of people tend to see this passage as Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah, but really it was the start of a very long learning curve that was to continue long past the Resurrection. Whilst it has to be said that pennies were beginning to drop in Peter's head, much more had to happen for him – and the Twelve.

Long ago it struck me that this passage – as in the other Evangelists, - marked the beginning of Jesus' pressure being applied to the disciples, for they seemed to be drifting along with the tumbling tumble-weed, with not goal or not much purpose. Jesus knew that if they were going to be of any real use in His mission, then they had to get their minds and gumption on the move. The next week for them was quite a startler.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

I find it surprising the extent to which we use all sorts of words and even practices without giving them a lot of thought. Patterns are nice and easy to follow, but unless one's mind and will is engaged also, progress is far from automatic, and production is a very rare event.

Whatever do we really mean when we talk worship? The answer might be a bit of a shocker. Are you game?

Quite a few years ago now, I was asked to give the Christmas address at a Combined Churches Christmas Service in the town where I was then priest. It was an outdoor affair, run each year in early December, and it included the fact that some of the shops would be open or opening soon, which meant that quite a few people would be in ear-shot if not heart-shot. In other words, whatever that service conveyed to anyone listening needed to stand up to examination, ring bells for even the 'unwashed,' and echo and re-echo for some time to come.

Fortunately for me, this event occurred not all that long after the pop singer Madonna had held a gig in Adelaide, and lots of the local young folk had spent their money and travelled for the occasion. Madonna, obviously, had a rather greater appeal for the young than a slowly ageing clergyman – even if he was involved with a combined Churches Youth Group in those days.

So as we were approaching Christmas, I asked the assembled group of people what they meant when they used the word *worship*. Did they mean singing hymns, or praying, or reading Scripture, or listening to me? Locals who knew me seemed aware that I was setting a trap, and hesitated offering an answer. So I pointed to the Madonna phenomenon.

How did people respond to Madonna, I asked. First – to my small mind – there was the cost. Tickets alone cost \$70 or so. (It was early 90s.) And the trip to Adelaide – not cheap from three or four hours away. Then accommodation. And how much did you spend on T shirts and all the other stuff for sale? And how much did you bend your thoughts and actions to Madonna-like life styles? The repercussions were starting to build up.

There was some sort of gentle protest arising. How could I *begin* to compare a Madonna concert with the Faith? But I was not – I was pointing out what constitutes worship. Worship costs, when it is real worship. Worship is a life-style, a *modus operandi*. It is living like Someone; responding to other people like Someone. *And it does not have a lot to do with feeling warm and fuzzy, or singing hymns and praying, All that is designed to give food for thought, food for expressing what you discover in the ordinary intercourse of life and living.*

*So the terrifying thought is that we can learn from young people's worship of Madonna or any other idol. It is no mistake that this is the **nomen** that is given to such people.*

As you might have imagined, the response of that congregation to that sermon was very mixed. The holy ones were appalled that the service was dragged down to such depths. And those less holy and elevated saw clearly, some for the first time in their lives, what worship is designed to provide. Rumblyings continued for really quite some time. And that is not too bad for a sermon, eh!

We get so terribly thingy when our senses have been disturbed. Now perhaps we can imagine how people felt when Jesus got under their skin. But as time passed, it became clear that Jesus was right and the holy ones were way off course.

So when we gather Sunday by Sunday, it is not to go through some boring routine, nor is it to get all warm and fuzzy. Worship is not designed to entertain nor to comfort necessarily. And it is not directed inwardly. This is all for other people. The whole faith is for other people.

Now perhaps the rest of that passage from Romans begins to take real shape, and provide reasons why it looks outward to 'my effect on other people.' Put simply and clearly, as the People of God begin to realize (**that**

means ‘to make real, does it not?’) what the faith is all about, then benefits begin to accrue to people around about. With a bit of luck, they begin to see small cameos of Jesus in the lives and actions of His followers. Love begins to flow and concern for others become visible.

Just the same as when people worship Madonna (not the real one, although the outcome may well be similar.

Sentence

If you want to become a disciple of Jesus, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.

Matthew 16: 24-5

Collect

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy, keep us in the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Old Testament Lesson

Exodus 3: 1 – 15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."

When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM.**"² He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, '**I AM** has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Psalm

105: 1 – 6 & 23 -26

Praise the Lord; O give thanks to the Lord for He is good: and His mercy endures for ever

Who can express the mighty acts of the Lord: or fully voice His praise?

Blessed are those who act according to justice: who at all times do the right

Remember me O Lord, when You visit Your people with Your favour: and come to me also with Your salvation

That I may see the prosperity of Your chosen: that I may rejoice with the rejoicing of Your people, and exult with those who are Your own.

We have sinned like our ancestors: we have acted perversely and done wrong

At Horeb they made themselves a calf: and bowed down in worship to an image

And so they exchanged the glory of God: for the likeness of an ox that eats hay

They forgot God Who was their saviour: that had done such great things in Egypt

Who had worked His wonders in the Land of Ham: and His terrible deeds at the Red Sea

Therefore He thought to destroy them: had not Moses His servant stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath from destroying them.

Epistle

Romans 12: 8 – 21

² This is the Divine Name – JHWH – used to be translated 'Jehovah'

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

GOSPEL

Matthew 16: 21 – 28

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

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NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

If this passage is not read in today's service, then it is a matter of very great pity. Of all the passages in the Old Testament, this one is most formative. Not only does it tell of the call of Moses, but it also provides the closest you will ever get to the name of God.

I guess you are aware of the fact that wherever in (most) Bibles, you find the word LORD in capital letters, it translates the Divine Name often translates these days as Yahweh –JHWH using the Hebrew consonants without vowelling. No Jewish person will ever utter that Hebrew – all manner of periphrases will be used instead, for the Divine Name is so holy. It is totally beyond useage.

I am Who I am; I will be Who I will be; I was Who I was. You will be more familiar with the old ending to the psalms: Glory to God, Father Son and Holy Spirit (as in the beginning, so now and ever after shall be)

Who was and Who is and Who will be.

John in Revelation has a subtle variant on that formula – look it up and see for yourself.

Notice then, in the Gospels, Jesus' use of the 'I am' statements, referring to Himself, and actually claiming divinity for Himself.

Psalm

'The mighty works of the Lord' are often mentioned in psalms and other parts of Scripture. And well they may be. The interesting history of Israel is often invoked by the prophets in particular, as source of grounds for learning quite something of the nature of God. Speaking of 'nature' that tends to be a rather secondary source of information about God, in spite of the Creation story being at the forefront of the Biblical narrative.

What is also basic to Israel's understanding of God – *and itself* - is that awareness of sin and stupidity in failing to follow its own vision.

Epistle

I have referred, recently and often, to the sorts of contrary comment by atheists and others against religion and superstition. Please just read through this passage again, and see if you can find the slightest thing to disagree

with, unless of course you are a self-obsessed, self-driven egoist. As Paul put it, against love there is no law. If people even began to live along the lines Paul enumerated, life and relationships would be so much better and stress-reduced.

Gospel

And because people will take no notice of the Gospel way of life, and never have, what Jesus anticipated in today's passage was and remains necessary. Here is the lead-up to the remedy for human evil, and even that is disregarded by the majority of humans who inhabit this planet. *What fools we mortals be!*

Peter's determination to stop Jesus in His tracks stemmed from the long-held perception that the Messiah would not / could not die. What sort of a victorious person could he be if death lay in front of him? So triumphalist was the old Jewish perception of Messiah (and far too often, the more populist view of the Christian Faith) that it took a long time to bury – and is still above ground in some Jewish circles.

Notice too how Jesus underlines **in red** that His followers needed to same commitment as He showed. This was no single-handed rescue bid. This is a way-of-life business, make no mistake.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

I have been reading a very large tome illustrating the history of Australia over the 20th Century, and a fascinating book it is. Based on newspaper reports of the period, it underlines so much of what had happened over that century. Quite a lot of the material was known to me, in spite of my life spreading only over 2/3 of that period. But there is one thing that recurs constantly, whether it has to do with matters political, social or normal. The extent to which various people and nations strove for the right things in ways and means totally immoral is utterly astounding. For instance the moral rage after World War 1 that led to the terribly punitive reaction on Germany was advised against by a few moderates of the time, one of them a cousin to my grandfather. Moral indignation (or immoral egoism) overruled them. The result was Hitler's regime – and the world could have done without that!!!

That, of course, was just one of the enormous list of folly perpetrated on people all over. The Russian Revolution did not bring about the just outcome it promised, but rather a far more severe and dishonest regime that cost the lives of millions. On and on the list goes

It is not as if there had been no prior precedents to go by. All of human history has been marred by wars, revolutions, control freaks and such like. And each time a crisis has arisen there has been someone who was prepared to take up arms or other power means to suppress and destroy whoever dared to raise their head in disagreement.

Even as I write this, recent days (June,2010) have seen the removal of one Prime Minister and replacement with another in this country of ours. Political execution is as damaging as physical execution, and it was preceded by and based on similar dishonesty that is passed over as expediency. *It is expedient that one man dies rather than all the people perish.*

That was one of the justifications for the crucifixion of Jesus, you may recall. And as a sort of exercise for us this morning, I offer a simple comparison between today's Epistle and today's Gospel. I think you will find it to be remarkably powerful

Let's start with the Epistle. Paul to the Romans. Having offered his *magnum opus* on the Faith and the reasons for his acceptance of it, the author goes on to list the points, purposes and values of Gospel living.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

You are free to read on this rather interesting if exhaustive list of ways to operate as a disciple of Jesus. I challenge anyone to come up with anything that is disagreeable in this passage, anything that is likely to hurt or damage another person. It is a rather moving, sometimes challenging path to travel, even to the extent of its pacific approach to gainsayers. (I would find it difficult to bless persecutors, but partly because I have not had a lot to cop from them.

Perhaps the hardest part, and apparently so for those of Christian Faith who seem to regard themselves as activators of vengeance, is to leave the outcome to God. 'Vengeance is mine, says the Lord' tends to be somewhat

invisible, partly because we do not agree with God's idea of vengeance. He tends to be too soft on people, does He not?

Now it does not take a lot of imagination to see how, if and when people operate in this sort of way, that life would become, suddenly and remarkably, peaceful. Stress levels would drop dramatically, and so would that eternal gap between rich and poor. Old ills would disappear because all would be well-fed, loved, and looked after. And self esteem would rise geometrically.

So who ever could have a fight with such a way of living?

And the answer is there before I get the question written down.

And there is a precedent for that sort of response. It is there in the Gospel for today. Jesus knew, right from the outset that He was fighting an uphill battle, because He was a realist, and was painfully aware of the basis of the human condition and the human dilemma. Plain ordinary sin and selfishness would not deign to listen to what He had to offer. He was as aware of the cost to Himself of offering such an option, as He was aware of the cost to whoever dared to follow in His footsteps.

The best way to destroy a dangerous idea is to murder the messenger. *How often has that happened in human history? Even the Church attempted that path time and again! Remember Galileo?*

Whilst contemporary Jewish theology said that the Messiah could not, would not be killed, our Lord was painfully aware otherwise. And He also knew that any attempt to avoid such a harsh response from leaders would mean the end of the dream, the end of the Gospel.

Ponder that a moment or two.

Give thanks that you have a Lord Who was made of sterner stuff.

And then see the path that lies in front of you, here and now.