

Romans 9:1-5

Paul expresses his love and concern for his Jewish brothers and sisters, and celebrates the covenants, promises, law - and the Christ - that the Israelites received from God.

I am speaking the truth in Christ - I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit - I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus tries to get some time to himself after hearing of John's death, but the crowds find him, and end up, late in the day, in a remote place and without food. Jesus instructs the disciples to feed them, but they object that they have few resources. Jesus then feeds the crowds with the disciples' food, after which baskets of leftovers are gathered up.

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Readings

COCU50A, Pentecost 9A, 6th August 2017

Genesis 32:22-31

Jacob spends the night wrestling with a man until dawn. In the fight, Jacob is injured, leaving him with a limp, but he is also blessed and his name is changed to Israel. Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

Psalms 17 (1-7,15)

The psalmist affirms his commitment to follow God's ways and be faithful, and to trust in God's willingness to answer his prayer.

Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit. From you let my vindication come; let your eyes see the right. If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress.

**As for what others do, by the word of your lips
I have avoided the ways of the violent.**

My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped.

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;

incline your ear to me, hear my words.

Wondrously show your steadfast love, O saviour,
of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;

when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.

Commentary by John van de Laar, Sacredise

GLOBAL APPLICATION: The challenge of the Gospel becomes even more urgent when we recognise that there is enough food being produced to feed all the people in our world. The problem is not with the food, it is with people not having money or opportunity to get the food they need. The story of the feeding is a prophetic word challenging us to work for ways to provide for the needs of everyone. This may mean working against unfair farming subsidies, or unjust trade laws, or it may mean ensuring that the way we buy and use our food is supportive of just practices. These are complex issues, but eating simply, minimising waste, and buying from producers and distributors that pay a fair wage and engage in just practices is a relatively easy first step. The readings from this week's Lectionary can also be expanded beyond just this one issue, though. God's gracious covenant with humanity is a challenge for us to recognise the dignity and humanity of all people, and to ensure that our attitudes, our ethics and our worship are free from exclusionary or diminishing language and practices, from dominance and power abuses, and from compliance with any system that unfairly oppresses or disadvantages some in favour of others. Essentially, we are called to become the people of God, welcomed at God's table, and living as global citizens with a world-centric perspective and a God-inspired longing for healing, justice, peace and inclusion of all. It's a dream, perhaps, but one worth striving for.

LOCAL APPLICATION: In our communities, homes and churches we all have resources that can be used to care for, to 'feed' others. As people of God we are recipients of God's covenant with us. We are those who know God's provision and abundance - even if we aren't financially wealthy. The call we must face, though, is to be those who can trust in God's care for us, and lean into God's commitment to us, and allow this to release us in generosity, in inclusivity and in service of others. Paul's care for his Jewish brothers and sisters meant that he was willing to sacrifice and serve them wholeheartedly. And Jesus' words to the disciples ring through the centuries to us: "You feed them". This means that we cannot avoid the responsibility of learning

to care for and seek to serve those in our neighbourhoods, churches and even our own families. It means that we cannot hoard what we have, but must be willing to live simply and share what we have, inviting others to sit at the table with us. It means that we must be willing to become God's provision, God's welcome, God's commitment and God's service to others. Inevitably, we will find ourselves wrestling with God over these challenges, because it is never easy to be called by God. And inevitably we will find our hearts broken, our souls and bodies wounded by the grief and need we will find ourselves facing as we seek to serve others. But, in spite of this, we will also know the joy and 'reward' that comes when we know we are being used by God, and we are growing the community that knows and shares God's feast.

How did it happen, God? How did we come to believe in scarcity?
In "not enough to go around". In "you gotta look after yourself"?
How did we miss the plenty bursting out around us?
How did we fall for the deception that what we can grasp in our hands would ever be enough?
How did we grow so blind and so foolish,
that we would allow so much beauty and life, joy and laughter,
sharing and love, to pass us by unnoticed?

How poor we have become, and how poor we have made others,
simply because we forgot your infinite, overflowing abundance;
because we allowed ourselves to think that sharing and giving
leaves us with less;
because we nurtured appetites that are never satisfied
unless they have far more than is needed,
thinking our gluttony would silence our fear.

Forgive us, and teach us about your generosity again;
remind us that you are able and willing
to do far more than we can imagine;
and open our eyes to the plenty we enjoy,
the plenty we can share,
and all the plentiful goodness in our world
that cannot be owned, but can be enjoyed by all. Amen. *(John van de Laar)*