**14/07/2019 Genesis 50:15-21**

**The Desire for Vengeance**

* To take upon ourselves the punishment of those who have wronged us
* Is with us from childhood, and never leaves
* We grow: we may think that we are not vengeful people
* But then we suffer an injustice and strong waves of emotion flow
* We need to hear teaching from Scripture about what do
* More than this: we need power from the Holy Spirit
* So that we may respond wisely to injustice
* Not just for the sake of others: harming them
* But also for ourselves: so that we are not eaten up with anger
* The Good News: God is just, and cares about injustice: he avenges
* More than this: in Christ God draws good out of injustice
* Good for us, and even for those who have wronged us

**The Teaching of Scripture**

* In today’s readings we get a pattern of teaching on vengeance
* So we heard this in the Romans reading: **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.’**
* Note: it does not say: just drop your need for vengeance
* Simply: do not take it into your own hands
* In the scriptures God is deeply concerned about injustice
* And so we are counselled to leave our desire for vengeance with God
* Including God working through government (Romans 13)
* Part of our response: to be able to recoginse our feelings
* To name our desire for vengeance: And to leave it with God
* In the Gospel we hear other teaching on this theme: **‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.’**
* Jesus commands us to refrain from putting ourselves in God’s place
* We do not know all the circumstances of another person’s life
* We do not even know the full truth about our own lives
* What we can do with real wisdom, however, is forgive
* We do well by acknowledging our desire for revenge
* But leaving it with God
* If you like: to make God your debt collector
* So: an analogy: a broken contract in business: it hurts; emotionally
* Leave it with the debt collector, they are taking care of it
* So there’s no point lying awake at night: they will do the job
* God will do the job: and God is generous
* He will make sure that we don’t miss out
* But will bring out good for us in ways we can’t imagine; and for others

**The Joseph Story**

* And this brings us to the Genesis reading: this teaching in narrative form
* Here’s how it starts: **Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph’s brothers said, ‘What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?’**
* What wrong? Planning to kill Joseph: selling him into slavery
* **So they approached Joseph, saying, ‘Your father gave this instruction before he died, “Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.” Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.’**
* Now what do you think? Do you think dad really said this?
* I don’t think so: they are afraid that now the patriarch is dead
* Joseph will use his position of power to exact vengeance
* Here’s how the text goes on: **Joseph wept when they spoke to him.**
* In Genesis Joseph doesn’t weep when he is thrown in a pit
* Or when he is sold into slavery; or when he is falsely accused
* Or when he is thrown into a dungeon in Egypt
* He weeps in refence to his brothers: when he first seems them again
* And now: I would say because he sees they are not fully reconciled
* The text goes on: **Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, ‘We are here as your slaves.’**
* The game is up: better to be slaves than dead, they reckon
* **But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.’ In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.**
* Joseph does not put himself in the place of God
* But more than this, he has the wisdom to see God at work
* Even in the injustices he has suffered
* Even at injustices suffered at the hands of his own family
* At the hands of those who should have shown love and care
* God, Joseph sees, has used even their evil for great good
* For himself, for them, for God’s people
* Through their sin Joseph has been exalted to power and authority
* And will use it to bless and not to curse

**The Exalted Christ**

* What we see in Joseph in a limited way in Genesis
* We see in its universal scope in the life of our Lord
* We meant harm to him in his suffering, crucifixion, and death
* But God highly exalted him, giving him the name above all names
* And reconciling all things to himself through Christ
* We are in debt to God, we have offended him, we have done injustice
* And yet God in Christ Jesus does not take vengeance on us
* But works his justice in the cross of Christ
* Cancelling our debt, removing offence, bringing forgiveness
* And so in the cross of Christ we see that **all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.**
* Since God has revealed himself to us in Christ our Lord
* We can be confident that he will deal wisely
* With our desire for vengeance
* That he will bring good out of the evil we have suffered
* Not only for us, but also for those who have hurt us
* We can find rest in God, who in Christ Jesus reveals what true justice is
* Thanks be to God!