

20260809 Trinity 10 (Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28)

Some weeks ago, we heard the story of Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness.

Hagar was an enslaved Egyptian woman in Abraham and Sarah's household. She was mistreated and fled into the wilderness. Later, she and her son Ishmael were sent away with very little provision. Yet in the wilderness, God met them.

Genesis uses very deliberate language. God sees Hagar, and God hears Ishmael. Hagar calls God "the God who sees me," while Ishmael's name means "God hears." Those whom Abraham and Sarah pushed aside were not invisible to God. Their cries were not ignored.

Today, we meet another member of this deeply troubled family. Joseph is the great-grandson of Abraham, and his story may be familiar through the musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* (by Andrew Lloyd Webber)

As I have pointed out over the last few weeks, favouritism runs through this family's history. Jacob openly loves Joseph more than his other sons and gives him a special robe. Joseph also tells his family about dreams in which they bow down before him.

Joseph is not perfect. He may be immature and rather too pleased with his favoured position. Yet the greater responsibility lies with Jacob, who repeats the favouritism, deception and rivalry of his own childhood.

Our hope is that children will learn from their parents' mistakes. Our fear is that they will repeat them.

When the brothers see Joseph coming towards them, all their accumulated resentment comes to the surface. They no longer see their younger brother. They see only "the dreamer," reducing him to the thing they dislike about him.

They first plan to kill him. Reuben persuades them to throw him into an empty pit instead, secretly intending to return and rescue him. Then Judah sees a caravan of Ishmaelites travelling towards Egypt and asks, "What profit is it if we kill our brother?" So they sell Joseph for twenty pieces of silver.

I find that question chilling: "What profit is it?"

The brothers place profit above brotherhood. Joseph is no longer treated as a person, or even as their brother. He becomes something that can be bought and sold. Reuben and Judah may prevent his immediate death, but neither stops the injustice. Joseph is stripped, thrown into a pit and sold into slavery.

Next Sunday, we will hear what happens to Joseph. But at this moment, Joseph does not know his future. Today's passage ends with him frightened, betrayed and enslaved. There is no justice in sight.

We must never use God's future goodness to excuse present cruelty. The fact that God can bring life out of evil does not make the evil acceptable.

Yet the identity of the caravan draws us back to Hagar and Ishmael. The descendants of Ishmael—the child whom Abraham's household pushed away—now appear when another member of Abraham's family is cast out. The rejected family and the rejected son meet on the road to Egypt.

We must be careful. These traders are not innocent rescuers; they participate in Joseph's enslavement. Joseph may escape death, but he is still stripped of his freedom and treated as property.

Nevertheless, Genesis reminds us that those pushed outside our boundaries do not simply disappear. They remain part of our shared human story.

That should make us think carefully about how we see outsiders today.

Migration has become one of the most fiercely debated issues in our country. Immigration policy is, of course, political. Governments must make decisions about borders, resources and the fair treatment of people seeking refuge or coming here to study, work and build a life. Christians may reasonably disagree about particular policies.

But people's lives must never be reduced to political slogans.

We sometimes hear immigrants described mainly as a burden: people coming to consume our resources, take what belongs to us or threaten our way of life. Beneath such language there can be something like the resentment of Joseph's brothers—**the fear that someone else is receiving too much and that there will not be enough left for us.**

Fear can make us deceive ourselves. It can persuade us that protecting our own position justifies treating another human being as a problem. It can make us forget that the stranger has a name, a family and a story, as well as gifts, hopes and wounds that we may not see.

Joseph's brothers call him "this dreamer." (I think it's very sarcastic!) Once they reduce him to a label, it becomes easier to strip him, throw him into a pit and place a price upon his life. Something similar can happen in public conversation. Once someone becomes merely a migrant, refugee, foreigner, burden or threat, it becomes easier to ignore their humanity.

Jacob's family is itself shaped by migration. Abraham travelled from one land to another. Hagar was Egyptian. Ishmael lived outside Abraham's household. Jacob lived where his father had been a foreigner. Now Joseph is carried into Egypt against his will.

The Bible does not allow us to draw a simple line between settled people who belong and strangers who do not. Its central family repeatedly crosses boundaries and becomes foreign in someone else's land.

Genesis asks us to notice whom we have stopped seeing as fully human.

Are we allowing fear or jealousy to speak more loudly than compassion? Are we protecting our comfort at another person's expense?

God sees Hagar. God hears Ishmael. Although today's passage leaves Joseph on the road to slavery, we trust that he also remains within God's sight. Those rejected or forgotten by human communities are not invisible to God.

Joseph's story is not finished here. Next Sunday, we will meet him again in a very different position. The brother who is powerless today will then hold power—and we will discover what he chooses to do with it. So I hope you will come back and continue listening to this remarkable story of reversal.

But this Sunday, may God open our eyes to see those whom others overlook, open our ears to hear the cries that others ignore, and help us recognise the humanity of those we have been taught to regard as strangers. In the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who is our Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver. Amen.