

All Saints Talk for Sunday 20th July 2025

Living The Dream

'Grace outpouring' Naomi Pendle

Genesis 43 (Joseph's care for the family)

What an amazing passage. Joseph has been away from Benjamin for over 20 years, and finally he sees his younger brother, the brother the son of his mother as well as his father. Finally, they are reunited. It's not often that you get a passage in the Bible where the main character has to leave midway through the story because they are so overwhelmed with emotion. You know, Joseph exits halfway through, to hide in a room. Can't cope with the emotion of it all, because it is that amazing, the grace and the kind of reuniting of these families, but just to say that I don't he didn't leave because he was embarrassed to weep in public. We've had kind of conversations in the UK recently when Rachel Reeves cried in Parliament. A couple of chapters later in Genesis 46 he does cry in public when he meets his father, but in this moment, he hides, because it's not yet time to reveal who he is. But this is an amazing story, an amazing story of Joseph's grace to his brothers, an amazing story of God's grace to Joseph that finally, when he would have never imagined it, he was united again with Benjamin. So what we're going to think about today is grace. What is grace? Where is it visible in your everyday and where is it visible in our church family? And I'm not really going to answer that directly, but I'm going to make us think through a couple of windows, through a couple of perspectives.

I want us to think about food. Food? Well, we had a there was a big church feast last weekend. There's a lot of food around in this beautiful season. I was at the swimming pool in the RUH this week, and I saw a mum picking blackberries off the bush. It's the season where we start to think about harvest. But there is food throughout this story. In fact, food throughout the story of Joseph that we can often miss, but the food in this passage is telling us a lot about power and a lot about grace. Who do you eat with? What do you eat? What is given? Who has the power to give? Who is receiving, who is at the table, but also, what is grace for? I don't know what you're feeling at the moment. Are you feeling overwhelmed by the gifts of grace in your life, by new houses and amazing friends and the sun or the rain this morning that was a gift of grace. Or are you feeling just that you're crawling to the edge and you just need some grace to survive it all. And Grace is for us as individuals, wherever we're at in our in our kind of journey at this moment, but this story, and Joseph's story, is much more

about grace for us as individuals. It's about grace for us as God's family, and also about grace for the world. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to talk about Joseph's family, their their undeserved grace, but then their freely given grace. And then I'll go on to talk about God's current family, our undeserved grace and then our freely given grace. So we start with Joseph's brothers, Joseph's family and their undeserved grace. So as I'm sure you all remember, this story started a good few weeks ago. I've loved listening to this teaching on Joseph. I lecture at the University on famine and conflict and it's been really good to hear about famine from a kind of biblical perspective, but we heard many weeks ago about Joseph being thrown into a pit, and his brothers sitting around the edge of the pit as he's in the pit, hungry and they are eating bread. Now 24 years later, this sin, this awful thing they did to their brother, throwing him in a pit, not eating with him, then selling him into slavery, is still haunting the brothers, even as they cope with famine and the horror of famine these brothers still have in their mind this deep sin that they committed against one of their own, against their own family, driven by jealousy, by his coat and the dreams he was having. And so Jacob, though, tells them, you've got to go back to Egypt to get more food. This is a time of famine. We are not surviving. You've got to go back. But I suspect that on the brother's mind is the fact that they sold Joseph to Egypt. They're going back to a land that is problematic to them because it reminds them of their sin, and they want to run far away from their sin. But now to survive, they must go back. Back, and the first time they went, strange things happened. This strange, powerful man in Egypt paid them more attention than they were hoping. They were hoping to just get some grain. He imprisoned them. They've left their brother Simeon there, and now they've got to go back again if they're going to survive.

And it's common during famine, and people migrate. So in Sudan at the moment, as you know, I work in Sudan and I study famine. There, millions of people have migrated to get food. So I was in the Nuba Mountains a few months ago. This is quite a wealthy family, initially from Khartoum, the capital, but they have migrated over 500 kilometers to a completely different area because they needed to find food. You move to find food. I'll briefly mention this. This is an image sent to me by Reverend Angelo Bello, who we sent money to at Christmas. This is some the politics has changed and they've been able to return to some churches they weren't able to go to before. But this is a recent church that they've gone to and has been destroyed by war, and they're now kind of suffering the consequences of famine still. But when there is famine, people are on the move. But Joseph's brothers were hesitant to go back, to go back to Egypt. The strange things had happened, and they knew Joseph might be there, and it reminded them of their sin, of that initial selling of their brother. And there were

other things in the story that were reminding them, as you might remember from their first journey to Egypt, when they left, they left with 10 sacks of grain. The 10 brothers went. Benjamin was left behind. Joseph, obviously, is in Egypt, unknown to them. And they go. So they've gone home with 10 sacks of grain. But when they get there, they realize they've got their silver still with them, 10 portions of silver, and they are nervous about this. How did we not pay for this grain? This powerful man in Egypt, who they don't know as Joseph, is already causing them problems, and now they've got this extra silver in their sack. So when Jacob sends them back, he sends them back, not only with money for another 10 sacks of grain, but also money to repay the previous sacks. They go back with twenty amounts of silver. Maybe it occurred to them that when they initially sold Joseph, they sold him for 20 shekels of silver. So you have this kind of these things, these images are coming back, maybe reminding them of just what they did. And you can see it's playing on their mind. So when they are invited to Joseph's house that they don't know as Joseph and they are very nervous, and they they are, they're kind of wondering, what are we doing? Like what is happening to us? Why are we going to his house? This is not normal treatment. We are just trying to buy grain. What comes to them and what they worry about is the fear that they will be taken into slavery. They also worry about their donkeys, but they themselves fear slavery. So again, on their mind as we sold our brother into slavery. Is that what's going to happen to us? And I think it's a reminder to us of the power of what sin and jealousy can do when we act on it, how it can haunt us. And it was haunting them even though their lives were at risk from famine. But eventually they agreed to go. Jacob lets them go and lets them take Benjamin with them. He fears letting Benjamin go, because Simeon has been left in prison, and he fears Benjamin might be lost to him too, but he realizes if he remains at home, he will die, and people migrate during famine, because if they don't go, they will die. So he lets them go and makes that long journey up to Egypt, but he wants to send gifts with them. These brothers were horrible to Joseph. They could not have been more horrible. They wanted to kill him, then they sold him into slavery. They do not deserve any grace. But now we move on to think about how Grace was freely given to him. Now we see, first of all, we see Jacob's gifts. When Jacob sends the brothers and he sends Benjamin, he's desperate to get them back. He says, If Benjamin doesn't come back, I'll be so grieved, I will basically die. He needs Benjamin back. That is his reminder of Joseph and of the whole family. So he sends what I'd call reciprocal or conditional gifts. He sends beautiful gifts, he sends balm, he sends honey, he sends spices, he sends my he sends pistachio nuts and almonds. But these are not an unconditional gift. These are not sorry, these are conditional. They're not unconditional. He wants something in return. He's trying to win the favor of this

man in Egypt, the man that he doesn't realize is Joseph. He's trying to persuade him and win favor with him. And of course, sometimes we give gifts like that, and that's not bad, but it's not grace. So sometimes we give gifts because we want something back. We might want a favor in return, even if we're only going to ask for a favor in a few weeks time or a few months time. So these are conditional gifts. They're gifts that are going to honor him. They're kind of gifts to show Joseph that they respect him, that they're going to bow down and worship him.

I don't know if it seems odd to you, but these are lavish gifts of food, and it's a time of famine, so they're at their edge of survival, and they're sending pistachio nuts and almonds. This is food, and this is like, beautiful food, but actually, this is really normal. I see it in my research. In the Nuba Mountains in southern Sudan a couple of months ago, we went to this family and before they've moved from Khartoum, because of hunger, because of conflict, they have almost nothing left. They're lucky if they eat a meal a day. They're a large family. And when we went, they served us food. They served us may It's like sweet corn, but massive sweet corn, bigger than I've ever seen. And they also served us coffee, like freshly ground, beautiful coffee would be any coffee in the coffee shops, in Bath, these rich foods, and it's odd, you know, they were on the edge of possible famine. It's likely to come in this area, because a million people have fled to this area. So how do they still have food? And often what people do is they preserve the best, because it's a way to preserve dignity. Like these might keep them alive a bit longer, but if you hold on to those foods, and you hold on to the precious things, then you can still welcome guests, or you can give it as gifts. So even until the point of death, you have a way to preserve your dignity.

But these gifts were given to Joseph, really, to persuade him to give favor to the brothers. He was a stranger, but there was Grace in it too, grace from God, because these brothers didn't know it was Joseph, but they were the tastes of home for Joseph. So in a minute, we're going to get the Benjamin and seeing Benjamin and loving Benjamin, but just imagine having not eaten the foods from your home country for 2022, 24 years. Just imagine, if you've been abroad. I don't know what you miss, scones or mature cheddar actually, when I go to South Sudan and like, there's someone there from mission aviation fellowship, he always wants me to bring a massive block of extremely mature cheddar cheese. So yeah, but you miss the taste of home and and the brothers unknowingly have bought Joseph the tastes of home, so a gift of grace to him, a gift from God, even if the brothers didn't realize they were an instrument of that. But then Joseph's does give freely the brothers. He could punish them. I mean, they go into that house fearing he's going to they're going to be punished, that they might be

enslaved, that the donkeys might be taken. Gosh, if they knew it was Joseph, that was the man in the house, I think they'd have been even more certain that they would be punished, because Joseph knows that they sold him to slavery, but instead, he orders his servant to kill an animal for them to have a big feast. They are welcomed into the room with him. They don't eat with him because that would give him away. He sits apart in another room but he's eating. They are eating in the room with the Egyptians. They're feasting. This is a big welcome party, and the last time they ate together was around that pit, except Joseph didn't eat 24 years ago, he had been in the bottom of the pit, and they had sat round the edge of the pit, and they broke bread, and they did not give it to Joseph, and Joseph was set aside, but in their presence, in the bottom of the pit, waiting to be sold to slavery, and then in this passage, as they come back together, Joseph acts with this incredible grace. He does not cast them out. He brings them in for the first time again, he eats with his brothers, but he gives them a feast. He doesn't, you know, exclude them from the meal. He brings them into the meal, and they have a great time. And he must have sat on the edge of that thinking, Gosh, I long to be part of it. But he also gives them a second chance because he wants to see what they are like.

Now as a family, this family is God's family, but they are broken and jealous. 20 years ago, they sold him into Egypt because they were jealous of his coat. Yeah. And so in this meal, he also gives them a chance to demonstrate whether they are still jealous, like he was favored by Jacob. He favors Benjamin. He gives Benjamin a bigger portion. They are sat in their order of age and I don't know how much he had, but he was lavishly blessed. He was favored in an undeserving way. You know, for the brothers, there wouldn't have been any logic to why Benjamin had these kind of particularly favored gifts, but Joseph was eager to see how they responded, and this time, unlike two decades before, instead of being jealous, they love it. They love Benjamin. They are protecting Benjamin, and they are so grateful that he has been blessed. So instead of feeling jealous, they rejoice and they feast and the party. God had worked to shape the family, to change them into a family that would celebrate others blessings. And this matters, because they are not just a family. They are the family chosen by God. In Genesis 12, it says in you of all the families on earth will be blessed. He's chosen this family that is repeatedly over generations jealous. Before the story of Joseph, there were previous stories of incredible jealousy amongst his family, and then in this moment around this feast, when Joseph blesses Benjamin more than the others. You get this display of love and a display of excitement and celebration for someone else's blessing. There is not jealousy, and that is the kind of family

that God needs us to be, a family that celebrates each other but is not jealous about each other.

So what about us? What about our current family? Our our undeserved grace. So in many ways, look at this church. Look around you. We are a church full of amazing grace and beauty. Look at Paul and Catherine. Look at the people sitting next to you, we are losing amazing family members, but we have amazing family members amongst us, and we bless each other, and we celebrate each other, and we celebrate each other's blessings, and that's incredible. But sometimes we hurt each other too. Sometimes we put each other in the pit, hopefully not actually, to sell each other to slavery, but we don't always love each other as we should. Sometimes we feel incredibly jealous. You know, when people's houses are bought, when we're still trying to negotiate our own house purchases, or people have jobs when we don't, or people have relationships and families when we don't, or people can cook better than us, and we have a disaster and the cake falls apart, but we feel jealous, and people wrong us, and they still sometimes look like they're more blessed than us, even though they have wronged us, even though they have hurt us, even when they don't realize they have hurt us, we are God's family. We are set apart and his children, but God's family has never been perfect. God is making us into His image, but we are not there yet, and it's really hard to not be jealous.

What I also love about this passage is the fact that we see this again. We see Grace freely given to this family, this family now, but tracing from the line of Joseph in this passage, we start to see the rise of Judah.

Judah is the one that talks to Jacob. He takes the lead. He says to Jacob, we can't go back to Egypt unless we take Benjamin. He is the advocate, and he is taking on that leadership role. And when Benjamin's given more food, he celebrates. He does not feel jealous. He does not act in a vengeful way. Now, in a few chapters, time in Genesis, 49 as Jacob is dying, and he's by now in Egypt as well. He blesses His children, and he gives them different blessings and and it's fascinating in itself that he blesses Judah and says, You are a lion's cub, Judah. And he prophesies that Judah will have the eternal King, not Reuben, the oldest son, not Joseph, who's been the hero of this story, not Benjamin, who kind of comes across as the innocent one. Judah, the one who enslaved Joseph, who put him in a pit, whose idea it was to sell him to slavery. Judah, the one who could not have fallen further. But it's Judah, he says, who will become the lion and whose lion will become the eternal King. Judah is repentant in this passage, and we start to see the depth of that repentance, that he is willing to celebrate and not be jealous.

But this is a scandalous grace. So if we skip forward to the New Testament and as we know, Jesus comes from this line of the father of the family of Jacob in Matthew one, it says the line that he comes from Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac the father of Jacob. Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, not Joseph and his brothers. Judah and his brothers, Jesus comes from the line of the brother who got it wrong and was repentant and received incredible grace, who was welcome to the table, who was given incredible food to eat, but who was also incredible to willing to make sacrifices. And so we are from a line not of perfect children, but of imperfect children, but of children who are willing to receive that grace. So then we go to Jesus, and where does he sit? Jesus is King. He is God. He could sit apart from us and eat, but when He was on earth, he ate with us. He ate with His disciples. He did not sit apart from us. He welcomed us to the table, and he sat with us, not because we deserved it, but because he showed us grace. And through that grace, he brought us into the line of Judah. He bought us into that family that would always be showing grace. And then, of course, ultimately, in that meal, that final meal, not only did he bring his disciples together, but he said that he was the food that they needed to eat, that take this this is my This bread is my body given for you. This blood is my blood shed for you, that he would feed them, that he would sit with us. He wouldn't be like the Egyptians, who would be set apart because they thought they were more important. Jesus had every right to think he was more important. He is God, but he sat with us. But then more than that, he provided the real food we need. He died for us, the ultimate act of grace, that we would be welcome to his table, be welcome to his family, that we would be part of all that he was doing here on Earth.

So what is grace, this undeserved but freely given gift? How is it visible in your everyday when you eat, when you're jealous, when you're not jealous, when you're seeking blessing for people? How is it visible in our church, and think about the food you eat and what it means, and who you eat with, and who you gather with, and how often you remember Jesus's sacrifice of eating with us, but giving his his body as a gift for us that we remember through that meal. But this matters. It matters to us individually, because we need grace. We get it wrong, but we need to live in those blessings as a family, as a church family, we need to have grace for each other. You are amazing, but you will get it wrong. I get it wrong a lot. We need to have grace for each other, and we need to do that because, as Paul Bright said earlier, the church is unique. We are a group of people, but we are not any group of people. We need to be defined by that grace so the world sees that we are something different, because Jesus was so different.