

Trinity 11 (2020)

One critic credited the popularity of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical "*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*" to its family-friendly story line and catchy music.

The music may be catchy (most of Webber's music is) and the story *as presented in musical* may be "family-friendly", but the same can hardly be said of the actual story found in the Bible.

Quite the opposite is true. The story of Jacob (aka Israel) and his 12 sons is anything but "family-friendly". Here, you find a family about as dysfunctional as they come.

To begin with, Israel shows favouritism. Today's Old Testament reading opens with these words: "**Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children,**" and it showed. Favouritism is likely to bring about rivalry and strife among siblings, and this is what happened in Jacob's family. Don't do it.

But dysfunction had been going on in this family long before we picked up the story in today's reading. If you go back several chapters, you will find that the eldest of Israel's sons, Reuben, had had an affair with one of his father's concubines.

And then later in today's reading you find hatred, envy, deception and murder just barely averted. Again, this family seems saturated with dysfunctionality.

Perhaps you have known families like that. Or, perhaps you have been a part of such a family. If you have, don't despair, as I hope to show in this sermon.

Dysfunction is all around us in today's world. In families, yes, But, also in society. Right now we see the breakdown of good order, dysfunction, in a number of our major cities.

Portland, as I am sure you know, has been especially hard hit. A few days ago there was a protest outside the Portland Police Department.

One of the speakers, according to the news account, was 17-year-old Erandi Jones-Vega. Her message, delivered from the back of a pickup truck, was: **“The goal right now is to disrupt the peace.”**

If this is not societal ‘dysfunction’, I don’t know what is.

Where will it all end? I’m sure I don’t know. Pray for our nation.

But an even more important question is: **Where is God in all this?**

Well, the Jacob-Joseph saga may just give us some help in formulating an answer to this question. We need to begin by asking:

Where was God in the midst of the dysfunction in Jacob’s family? /// I want to suggest: Present and at work.

And that is just what we have been seeing all the way through as we have made our way through Genesis in Trinity-tide . . . God remaining on the job in the midst of human dysfunction.

Just a quick recap of the narrative so far . . .

Genesis begins with God creating the world good.

But, early on a major challenge is presented. God’s image-bearing creatures intended to be caretakers of creation misuse their freewill and rebel.

What follows is disharmony and dysfunction at every level. One of the first manifestations of this disharmony and dysfunction comes when Cain kills his brother Abel.

What is God going to do about this situation? Destroy the world and start over?

Well he almost seems to have done that with the flood, but that was not His intent.

Rather, we find Him calling a particular family to be the vehicle for putting the world torn apart by sin back together again. The family was the family of Abraham, the family from which Joseph and later Jesus came.

But, as we have seen in today reading, as well as in previous ones, the family called to deliver the antidote to the pandemic of sin and self-destruction is as messed up as everyone else.

Where is God? ///

Answer: Not defeated, not an absentee landlord, but at work and on the job.

Over the course of the next few weeks, we shall be seeing God at work in the life of Joseph and his brothers.

They sell him into slavery out of envy and hatred, but God remains at work behind the scenes.

He turns around their conniving to bring about the preservation of the very ones who sold him into slavery.

When a famine comes and they are forced to go down to Egypt looking for food, Joseph is in the place he needs to be and has done what needs to be done to ensure that food is available. God is greater than their treachery.

Fast forward now to the New Testament and we see something similar played out in the life of Jesus. Wicked men sent Jesus to cross, but God, because He is a big God, used their wicked act to bring about the salvation of the world.

In view of what happened with Joseph and later with Jesus: Where is God in the midst of our disfunction? ///

Answer: at work and on the job.

You and I live in an age of overlapping kingdoms, a strange point in history.

On one hand, the Kingdom of God has arrived. It arrived with the arrival of the King, Jesus the Messiah. Sin and death were defeated on the cross. Moreover, what happened on Calvary is unrepeatable. No more offering for sin needs ever to be made.

But on the other hand, it is quite clear something is yet to happen, as dysfunction still abounds in the world. Sin and death, hatred and envy, remain very much a part of the human experience.

Where is God in such a world?

I have already told you: **At work and on the job.**

What is different is that God now calls us -- you and me -- to join Him at the point of the world's pain and to be a part of its healing.

We are called to continue the work of Christ. As He brought wholeness and healing, life and light, to the people He encountered and the places He went, so are we to do.

“As he is, so are we in this world,” says
1 John 4:17.

St. Paul echoes this thought in Colossians 1:21 where he speaks of filling up **“that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.”**

What is he saying? That Christ's redemptive work on the cross was somehow incomplete and needs supplementing by our efforts? No.

What he is saying that during this present age – the time between our Lord's two comings – those who have been made one with Christ in baptism are to follow their Lord in bringing the healing balm of the Gospel to the places of dysfunction and pain in the world.

Put another way, we are called to be the Jesus people see.

A tall order to be sure, but we don't do this thing alone or under our own steam. The Bible teaches that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are God's Temple . . . the place where heaven and earth overlap.

I once saw an advertisement in a magazine which caught my eye. Pictured was a set of hands, palms held out. Underneath the caption read: **“These are no ordinary hands. These are the healing hands of a chiropractor.”**

The same and even more can be said of our hands as baptised members of Christ's body: **“These are no ordinary hand. These are the healing hands of the risen, reigning and returning Christ.”**

As I prepare to close, let me encourage you to look for opportunities in this coming week to use those hands.

For God's sake (I say this devoutly), Don't keep them in your pocket! God's work, our hands! Human dysfunction, yet God on the job, ever bringing good out of ill. "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace." May this be our prayer this morning.