

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 3rd August 2008

Joseph: Servant, son and brother:

Genesis 37



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Amanda said last week that journeys can change and transform us, and this week we are looking at the start of Joseph's journey, one that took him from the safety and familiarity of his home to a different world.

There are 2 perspectives to this story: A *personal* message and a message for *us as a whole church*. The personal perspective is to do with the fact that Joseph was not perfect! Joseph was loved by his dad and by God and gifted spiritually, materially and probably intellectually. He went through awful times but became vital in God's plan for the survival of the Israelites and hence to us. But he did NOT have a good start: he was spoiled and insensitive – & probably arrogant? Despite his dad, Israel/Jacob, being such a foundational father, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel, as the brothers were to become, he was not sensible with Joseph, and his brothers hated him (v.4). Joseph wore a flashy coat and made his brothers jealous, he told tales and he boasted about his dreams – anyone with half an ounce of imagination could see what the dreams meant...But God does gift people of all ages and His purposes will be forwarded by their use even when we are far from perfect individuals.

God had plans for Joseph. Even though he didn't know how to use the spiritual gift of dreams and their interpretation that God had given him, God didn't take the gift away. Instead He allowed something awful to happen and hoped that Joseph would learn and grow as He fulfilled God's plan for the Israelites - and Joseph did learn! But he had to literally descend to the pits in order to learn. Sold into slavery and later thrown back into prison for something he didn't do. So Joseph the spoilt teenager grew up and became known for his integrity as well as his spiritual gifts, and he learnt to rely on God in the use of them and for his own future. Thus we see that God loved and used Joseph and He loves and uses us! So if you are young and wonder whether God gives gifts to youngsters, be encouraged! If you are not perfect take heart. Or if you're the parent of an imperfect youngster, take heart!

The message for us as a church is to do with Joseph travelling to a different culture. It's topical with so many of our church family in Kenya that we see Joseph here transported to an alien culture. He was presented with different ways of eating, dressing, with a whole new language to learn and very different ideas about God. Joseph, in leaning on the God of Israel, must have had to really think about and tease out what he really believed, what was fundamental and what bits of the change of culture didn't really matter and he could accept.

The Bishop of Guildford once said that the most important task for the church is "translating the gospel" to those outside the church. This seems to me to be very topical for us regarding those in our parish and town who never come to church, who are the other side of the road – some quite literally. We have had recent discussions at PCC about the Outward Giving policy: 10% abroad used to say it all. But since *Mission Shaped Church* (a book written 2004 by a working group set up by the Archbishop of Canterbury to look into new ways of being church) we are more aware of the un-churched - those who have NEVER been to church - and the de-churched - those who used to come or who have some link to church, but who no longer come most of the time. And there are plenty of both types on people in our own parish.

We've recently been discussing at PCC the possible need for a policy on mission *within* the parish, what our aims and objectives might be, what such mission might look like and how we should budget for it. What are we doing to bring the gospel to those who don't, won't or can't come through the doors on a Sunday? How are we "*translating the gospel*" for people who do not understand what we, as the Christian church, are all about?

An interesting thing to note from the whole story of Joseph is that God used Joseph's experience not just to change *Joseph* and his life, but to *change the lives of all his family*. We are the church family of those who have gone to Kenya and we must expect *their* experience to change *us* as a church. That might involve changes we can't yet imagine, but we should not expect church to be safe and predictable – Jesus wasn't, so God isn't either! Let's be open to where He's taking us and lean on Him for all that we need for the journey.

Witness: questions to discuss

1. Perhaps in 2's3' talk about experiences within your own family that affected your personality and faith.
2. Have you experienced "descending to the pits" and did it help you grow as a Christian?
3. How might we encourage the use of Spiritual gifts in people of all ages, from the oldest to the youngest?
4. How would you cope in an alien culture? What do you see as the fundamentals of faith, as distinct from our cultural influence/practices?
5. What do you think are the implications for us in "translating the gospel"? Which areas of the parish/age-groups/personality types etc are under-represented at St Paul's? What might we do about this? If possible, read Graham Tomlin's "*The Provocative Church*" pp 60-61.
6. How do you think we, as a church family, might be changed as a result of the Kenya trip? Pray for those in Kenya.