

**Sunday, 16th August 2020**

**TRINITY 10 2020 (Year A) – Matthew 15: 10-28; Genesis 45:1-15 –  
'The bigger picture'**

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Curate**

In 1986 there was an advert on television for the Guardian newspaper that has stayed with me ever since. Although it didn't make me start buying the newspaper, I think it was possibly the catalyst for making me realise that there is always a bigger picture to be seen in life.

The advert was very short, less than 30 seconds, and it showed 3 different angles of the same event. The first angle showed a skinhead turning a corner looking to his left and then running up the street, as a slowly moving car follows, its occupants watching him. The second angle, this time seen from behind the skinhead, shows him then running towards an old man and pushing him to the floor. But the final scene is taken from a much wider angle, and with a view of the whole event as it happens. And what we *then* see is the old man walking beneath some scaffolding unaware that a pallet of heavy ballast and bricks that is being lifted above him is suddenly beginning to collapse – behind the old man the skinhead turns the corner, looks to his left, sees what is about to happen and run towards the old man pushing him out of the way, and consequently saving him from serious injury, if not worse. The tag line to the advert was: 'It's only when you get the whole picture that you can fully understand what is going on'.

As I say, that advert has remained with me ever since, and helped the way I view things. And this idea of seeing the 'whole' or 'bigger picture' continues to feed into my faith, and is something which can be seen in both our readings today.

In our story from Genesis we have reached a climax. Joseph has just revealed his identity to his brothers; a revelation which comes as a massive shock to them as they didn't even know he was alive! Years before they had wanted to kill him, jealous of him and his dreams of which he would brag about seeing them bowing down to him. Their evil intent almost comes to pass in the hills

one day, until one of them sees some tradesmen in the distance and encourages them instead to sell Joseph. The brothers then return to their father, with Joseph's blood-stained coat in their hands, and report that Joseph must have been attacked and killed. Meanwhile the tradesmen take Joseph to Egypt where they sell him on as a slave.

22 years later however, after having had many ups and downs, including time in prison, Joseph has in fact become the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important man in Egypt and is now the person responsible for ensuring that through this time of famine, (something which Joseph had foreseen and been able to prepare for), there is enough food not only for the Egyptians but for those in the surrounding countries, including where his own family reside.

Now Joseph was a man of faith who had always been close to God and tried to give God credit for his successes, but it is at this point in today's reading that Joseph sees an even bigger picture. He suddenly realises that even the original evil act of his brothers had God's hand on it, and so says to his brothers: "Do not be distressed ..... because God sent me before you to preserve life".

Now I am aware that this potentially opens up a can of worms! How can a God of love, (the God of love in whom I believe), allow, or possibly even initiate bad things? This global pandemic that we are experiencing for example? But I believe this is where the 'bigger picture' thinking helps us. And I would direct us to Joseph's later comment to his brothers a few chapters later (*Gen 50:20*) when he says:

"As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today"

Because I *don't* believe that God causes bad stuff to happen! But I *do* believe that God brings good out of evil; that He can and does achieve His good purposes despite, and even through, our bad actions.

I know that there are many things in my life which I have done which I am not proud of, and I wish hadn't happened..... but, similarly to Joseph, I do now see that God can and has used these experiences for good..... And even through our current circumstances there have been and continue to be some amazingly positive and good things happening.

But so on to our gospel reading, which has fascinated and excited me in a new way as I prepared for today. Because I admit that I have always found this story a little uncomfortable. Jesus's initial reaction to this Canaanite woman does not fit well with the Jesus that I know and love. The Jesus who doesn't exclude anyone but embraces and has compassion on all ..... And yet here appears to be somewhat dismissive to this lady because she is not a Jew.

But then, in one of those sort of epiphany moments, I suddenly saw the human side of Jesus in a deeper way – as Jesus Himself seems to suddenly comprehend the bigger picture of His ministry.

Although Jesus realises who He is, of His identity as the Messiah, the One who would restore the relationship God wanted for and with all those He created; up to this point He has been concentrating on the Jewish people. Although Jesus knows His mission is universal, up until now there has been an order to that mission - the children of Israel first and then everyone else later. But the meeting with this lady suddenly changes things.

Having just been preaching about the teachers of the Jewish law who through their actions and teachings were confining God, Jesus now finds Himself challenged by this lady, and having to re-assess His own mission there and then.

And so as she comes to Him asking for mercy for her daughter, Jesus does not immediately answer. Unlike His disciples who are very quick to encourage Him to send her away, Jesus gives Himself time to think..... to take a look at this lady, and see a woman full of love and compassion for her child, who is willing to approach someone who is culturally her ancestral enemy..... And then, far quicker than we are able to see the bigger picture, Jesus realises that His universal mission can begin, right here and right now..... With love and compassion Himself Jesus invites the woman to push her faith further, teasing her with the question about throwing children's food to the dogs; using the word for dog that does not mean the wild roaming street dog, but the dog that is the little household pet..... And in what I imagine is a very special moment when their eyes meet, and this lady begins to fully comprehend who is before her, she realises that Jesus is asking her to take that final step of faith. And her answer does that, with wit as well, and possibly a gleam in her eye too. And there follows a moment of joy for them both. The woman having had her request for her daughter's healing answered, and in this encounter with

Jesus having had a whole new world opened to her. And Jesus, having Himself taken that next step and embraced the bigger picture of the full scope of His mission. And for me, that Jesus understands that it is a human trait to be slow in sometimes seeing the bigger picture, is very re-assuring.

In conclusion, I return to that Guardian tv advert – because none of us know what is round the corner. But sometimes when we get pushed to the ground it might actually be saving us from something worse, for ‘it is only when we get the whole picture that we can fully understand what is going on’.

And so today, in the midst of this pandemic, in the midst of all our troubles, I pray that God will help us all to embrace a *bigger picture* vision that will enable 3 things:

1. To know how much He loves each one of us
2. To believe that He can bring about His good purposes despite and even through all the things we do wrong
3. that will help us to stop and think and not rush to conclusions that may harm us and others.

AMEN