**Family Service Talk 27th March 2022**

**Genesis 32:3-8 + 33:1-11**

***3****Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.****4****He instructed them: ‘This is what you are to say to my lord Esau: “Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now.****5****I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favour in your eyes.”’*

***6****When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, ‘We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.’*

***7****In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups,[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+32%3A3-8&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-936a)*] and the flocks and herds and camels as well.****8****He thought, ‘If Esau comes and attacks one group,[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+32%3A3-8&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-937b)*] the group[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+32%3A3-8&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-937c)*] that is left may escape.’*

***33****Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants.****2****He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear.****3****He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.*

***4****But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.****5****Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. ‘Who are these with you?’ he asked.*

*Jacob answered, ‘They are the children God has graciously given your servant.’*

***6****Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down.****7****Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.*

***8****Esau asked, ‘What’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?’*

*‘To find favour in your eyes, my lord,’ he said.*

***9****But Esau said, ‘I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.’*

***10****‘No, please!’ said Jacob. ‘If I have found favour in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favourably.****11****Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.’ And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.*

I hope we have all remembered that today is Mothering Sunday … with maybe flowers or chocolates for someone! It is a day when we remember and give thanks for our mothers. For many this will be a joy and a pleasure but for others it will come with a sadness that they are no longer with us. And for some, tragically, the memories of their mother are only negative and upsetting. But all of us will, at some point in our lives, have had a mother figure who loved and nurtured us…. And whoever that is, we remember and give thanks for them today.

In the family services this year, we are thinking about peacemakers and I’m sure we all acknowledge how important and much needed peace is in the world at every level. But what has Mothering Sunday got to do with peace?

Peace is certainly not something that you find in households where there are young children and often just as little in a different way as children grow up. A mother’s role therefore is often to be the peacemaker in the family, sometimes physically separating 2 warring little ones or maybe bringing the wisdom and calmness needed to help pre-teens to begin to see that there are 2 ways of seeing things in an argument and their way may not necessarily be the best way! And as the children become young people and then adults, a mother’s role as peacemaker may involve mediating between warring siblings or simply being the ear to listen as the woes are poured out. One of the greatest joys as a mother is seeing two of your children re-discover their relationship with each other after falling out – whatever their age.

On another level, we have all watched with horror and fear as one country shatters the peace of another country, bringing desperate pain and sorrow, tragedy and destruction …. and we pray today especially for all those Ukrainian mothers now in refuge either in basement hideouts or other countries, in despair and desperate for peace to come. Also, those Russian mothers knowing that their sons have been sent to fight in a war that seems to have no reason or purpose, and who may not come home. God strengthen them we pray.

We pray for peace in that land. A peace that is far more than absence of conflict …. A peace that brings health, justice, protection, wholeness – the real peace that comes from faith in God who alone embodies all the characteristics of peace.

In our Bible reading today we heard about a very individual example of where peace was needed and indeed where, by God’s grace, it was achieved.

As always when we read from the Bible, we must set what we read in context, i.e., find out the back story. And so, if we look back to earlier in the book of Genesis, we see the history to this somewhat tricky situation – and it is clear that peace is much needed!

Jacob and Esau are the twin sons of Isaac and his wife Rebekah. Isaac is the son of Abraham and his wife Sarah and it was to Abraham that God had promised a land, a nation and much blessing through which all would be blessed – he was to be the Father of God’s people.

Esau was the older son and he became a strong hunter and was much loved by Isaac. Jacob was a quiet, home loving man, much loved by Rebekah. But there came a point, as in many families, where peace and harmony disappeared and we read in chapter 25 of the time when a hungry Esau gave away his birth right (the entitlement to inherit the larger portion of the family estate) for a bowl of the stew Jacob had made. He wasn’t bothered about the future, just is empty tummy now!

Time passed, Esau married two local girls and it was time for Isaac, who was by now getting old, to give his blessing and confirm the birth right on his oldest son Esau. However, Rebekah encouraged Jacob to deceive Isaac and thus he received the blessing and would therefore become head of the family when Isaac died. Esau found out what had happened and wanted to kill Jacob but Rebekah had sent him away for safety and to find a wife from among their own people.

As I’m sure you will remember, Jacob did find a wife but was then tricked by her father, Laban, and ended up with 2 wives but had to work for Laban for 14 years to get them. By the time of our reading, the wives and their concubines had produced 11 sons between them and Jacob was very successful in looking after Laban’s animals.

But Jacob wanted to return to his homeland with his now very large family and his many sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys and servants. And indeed, God commanded Jacob to return home. Initially Laban refused but with yet more trickery and deceit on both sides, Jacob and his family finally left Haran and set off back to Canaan.

And that is where we found Jacob in our reading – he knows that in coming home he has to meet with his brother Esau who, when he last saw him, was ready to kill him. What to do? How to put right the situation that had resulted in their estrangement? …….. Jacob decided to send a message to Esau that he wanted to come home – he held out a hand of friendship. The messenger returned with the news that Esau was on his way to meet him with 400 men! Jacob was terrified and he quickly split the camp into two so that at least some would be safe…. He was terrified!

But then Jacob did the very best thing …. He prayed to God!! We read his prayer in the verses between the two parts of our reading ….

*Colin / Max to read Genesis 32:9-11 ….* ***9****Then Jacob prayed, ‘O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, “Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,”****10****I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps.****11****Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children.****12****But you have said, “I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.”’*

And we read what happened in the 2nd part of our reading …. Joseph bowed down to Esau 7 times honouring him as his older brother …. Esau ran to meet Jacob and gave him a great big hug …. Jacob introduced his whole family to Esau …. Jacob gave Esau a gift of many of his animals – perhaps in part to make up for the stolen birth right but also in a desire to repair the broken relationship and restore peace.

And so it was that the brothers were reconciled. They put the past behind them, respected each other’s decisions and differences and lived separately but, by God’s grace, in peace. It was not by chance that the Bible includes the words “then Jacob prayed”. It was the crucial step then and is for us today. And God answered Jacob’s prayer, strengthening him and enabling him to know what to do next - gifts of animals, approaching humbly and respectfully, bowing down. This is such a lesson for all of us here – not just Mothers!

When we know we are not at peace with someone, we may be tempted to rush to put it right, lavishing gifts on them, trying to explain, justifying our actions. So often, it may make us feel better initially but the deep peace of a restored relationship is just not there. Before we rush in all guns blazing, we should take time to pray, just like Jacob did. And through prayer, God will guide our actions and our words. We know ourselves forgiven by God and so we will know to come humbly, seeking forgiveness from those we have wronged. Seeking ways to gently put things right together, always respecting the wishes of the other. In all that we do, seeking to restore the peace that only God can give …. *(****John 14:27****).* And this peace, that is beyond our understanding …. *(****Philippians 4:7****)* …. is a gift from God. Given, by his grace alone, not because we deserve it but because of his great love for all people. A free gift available to all through Jesus Christ. *(****Colossians 3:15****)* All we need to do is repent, believe and accept that gift …. Of God’s peace … perfect peace. Amen

***John 14:27***

***27****Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

***Philippians 4:7***

***7****And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

***Colossians 3:15***

***15****Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*