

*“Never again shall they feel hunger or thirst; because the Lamb who is at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd and will guide them to springs of the water of life.” (Revelation 7:16,17)*

The readings for today for your perusal are Genesis 32: 22-31, Romans 9: 1-5 & Matthew 14:13-21.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

How often do we feel alone? How often do we find ourselves wondering what is happening, and ask what can I do? Well the Bible lets us know frequently that we are not alone in thinking this way. The Patriarch Jacob had been left alone on one side of the River Jabbok after he saw his family safely across, one wonders if he knew that something was going to be decided that night. [Like Jacob do you find yourself wondering at times what is wrong, what is going to happen, what does God want me to do, it's a feeling, the Spirit is not comfortable, sound familiar?] Jacob knew that he was going home to face up to his brother Esau, he knew he had a lot to answer for but he chose to face him alone rather than risk his family. However, he didn't realise that it was not Esau he would face but God that night. What we know is that Jacob had struggled all his life to try to overcome his difficulties, his pride and tried to succeed in life, first with his brother Esau, then with his Uncle Laban, but now as he was about to cross back into Canaan, the promised land, he was shown that it was with God that he must wrestle, it was with God he had to struggle.

It is always the case that it is with God that we must wrestle, for we struggle in life because we struggle to accept what God wants us to do. It was and is God who held Jacob's and our destiny in His hands. So, God took on human form that night so that Jacob could wrestle with Him, but God proved to Jacob that he was no match for God by putting his hip out, and in that moment Jacob realised that he needed God and refused to let God go. Jacob figuratively and actually refused to let go of His God and for this God blessed him and changed his name. *“Your*

*name will no longer be Jacob. You have struggled with God and with men, and you have won; so, your name will be Israel"*

Because Jacob recognised his need for God and acknowledged God, God then acknowledged Jacob as his servant and gave him the new name Israel which means *"he struggles with God"* For it is through the patriarch Jacob the nation of Israel got its name and her characterization because they are the people who struggle with God and overcome.

Notice though that after Jacob wrestled with God he limped. This means quite simple that our encounters with God sometimes leave permanent marks, and they are not always pleasant, because when God comes into our lives He changes us and the past can be a hard thing to break from, so it leaves its mark. But we still limp away from our encounters with God having received His blessing, because we have overcome the difficulty and with the love of God we have prevailed. Just as Jacob went on under his new name to live a life of service to God, in the midst of and in spite of many troubles, he overcame them all because of his faith and trust in God. This gives us hope today because we know that God is with us even when He seems to be absent. God has come near to us in and through the Christ Jesus, in His assuming our death on the Cross of Calvary, and in His gift of resurrection to a new life for all those who believe. It is because of Christ Jesus that we know God and experience him in all aspects of our lives.

It is because of this that we know that God has not, does not, and will not desert Israel and if he will not desert them then he will not desert us his chosen people also. Yet in the book of Romans we find that Paul was upset because of his people Israel not believing in Christ. Paul was concerned for his people Israel. *"I am speaking the truth; I belong to Christ and I do not lie. My conscience, ruled by the Holy Spirit, also assures me that I am not lying when I say how great is my sorrow, how endless the pain in my heart for my people, my own flesh and blood!"* The Holy Spirit guides us and allows us to see and recognise the

truth, even though the world ignores the truth and doesn't want to hear it we must allow God's Spirit filled truth to guide us and fill us always. But what does this mean for Israel? We are told here that Israel still has a place in God's plan of salvation for the world, but they do not see what it is. Paul is upset because of their blindness and stubborn heartedness, for he sees that many of the Jewish people have not accepted Christ as the promised Messiah. Paul like all the Apostles was concerned to demonstrate that the gospel message follows on from the OT message and that it fulfils it, it completes it. Paul wants us to realise this and the Jews as well that in and through Jesus Christ God triumphed and brought all his plans to fruition. God does not hand out a covenant one day and then take it back the next, God had not forgotten his people, far from it. On the other hand, as wonderful as all gifts are, by far the most important gift that God has given to his people and the world is the Messiah, Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour. *"Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, for ever praised! Amen"* Here is one of the few places in the NT where Jesus Christ is explicitly called 'God'. Why then do people still deny him?

When people deny Christ, they find themselves in a barren wasteland, where they are bereft of food and sustenance. They are in a figuratively and spiritual desert, where they cannot grow or live. So, we find Jesus moving into the wilderness after hearing of John the Baptist's death, to grieve and to commune with God, to pray for John and his followers and to possibly consider his next steps and gain his peace once again. *"When Jesus heard the news about John, he left there in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself."* Wilderness time can last a long time, forty days or forty years, or it may be brief. Wilderness is a good place to grieve, pray, repent, and fast. It is a lonely place, but God is not absent. Because there are no distractions in the wilderness, it can be a place of spiritual intensity. Even in our lives we need to find a place of solitude, a

place in our homes, where we can find peace and quiet to commune with God and find our peace.

However, just like normal days we find that Jesus' time in the wilderness was cut short *"The people heard about it, so they left their towns and followed him by land. Jesus got out of the boat, and when he saw the large crowd, his heart was filled with pity for them, and he healed those who were ill."*

As always Jesus is moved by compassion for the people that follow him, that come seeking his spiritual food, for Christ provides for our needs. This is a continuing theme throughout the Bible - the people of this world are hungry and need to be fed, Jesus wants us to feed and take care of His sheep. In this wilderness were a people devoid of spiritual food, they had lived their lives in denial of God, and they struggled with him and failed to live up to his expectations, but now they had a chance to truly live.

For Matthew, this story of the feeding of the five thousand was a vivid expression of the compassion and the miraculous power of Jesus. Again, the Jewish people who followed Jesus would not fail to see who Jesus really was, because they would remember the feeding miracles of the OT, the manna in the desert (Exodus) and the Prophet Elisha's multiplication of loaves in 2 Kings.

But the disciples realised that the day was late and the people had nothing to eat, and wanted them to be sent home to get food.

Jesus had another idea *"They don't have to leave," answered Jesus. "You yourselves give them something to eat!"* Jesus was challenging the disciples, he wanted them to act and he used the food that they provided. He wanted to show them that God provides, but they must have faith, for it to work. Through their involvement, their belief, they cleared up more than they provided, perhaps there is a message here for us all.

Jesus told the people to sit down; he fed them, physically and spiritually. And to eat together is a symbol of unity. Jesus was feeding a large crowd of people, five thousand men, not including women and children. He was saying you are my family; you are welcome at my table.

The story does not tell us how the hungry crowd is fed in the wilderness; only that no one leaves hungry. We are his disciples, we are called by Jesus, to do something to feed his people. Are we telling them to sit down at our table, are we giving them spiritual food?

### PRAYER

Heavenly Father, too many people around us today are hungry both physically and spiritually. Help us today Lord to pray for an ending to their physical and spiritual hunger. Help us today Lord to pray for their wellbeing and for them to hear the Word of God, the life saving Words of life. Jesus our Lord and Saviour, Your Son, taught us to pray for others in need and boy does our society and our world need our prayers today.

Guide us with the Holy Spirit we pray so that we can do Your work and carry out Your will so that we can be a blessing in Jesus name to those we meet. Guide our words and our actions so that we can show Your love to those who are without love and to bring your message of hope to those without hope.

Far too many people around us struggle because they do not believe and are therefore wandering aimlessly in a spiritual desert, help the Lord we pray, go to them and heal them physically, emotionally and spiritually in Jesus name we pray and give you their names. Even though Lord we struggle to find the words to pray we know that the Holy Spirit within us is interceding on our behalf with you in Heaven. Hear our prayers we cry!

Bless all those who look after and care for us in our society, we especially remember the paramedics, the doctors, the nurses, the care home staff and all the key workers in those hospitals and care homes as well as the engineers, other emergency services workers and all those who transport goods and provide services for us, where we can get food, clothing heat and light, bless them Lord and uplift them we pray.

Give wisdom to our government leaders and guide our doctors and scientists so that we can find a cure to the Coronavirus, but also give wisdom to the people of our country so that they can follow guidelines to keep themselves and those around them safe. But help us Lord to continually pray and study and read the Bible so that we can gain wisdom and pass on that wisdom so that we can guide others to your lifegiving waters. In Jesus name. Amen.