



Hymn: StF 20 Be still for the presence of the Lord

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laLM9bNhN9w>

Be still, for the presence of the
Lord,
The holy One, is here;
Come bow before him now
With reverence and fear
In him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the
Lord,
The holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire,
With splendour he is crowned:
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant king of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the
Lord
Is moving in this place:
He comes to cleanse and heal,
To minister his grace -
No work too hard for him.
In faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the
Lord
Is moving in this place.

Hymn: StF 530 To be in your presence

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loR3iCtVhHw&t=154s>

To be in your presence
to sit at your feet
when your love surrounds me
and makes me complete

To rest in your presence
not rushing away
to cherish each moment
here I would stay

This is my desire, o Lord
this is my desire
this is my desire, o Lord
this is my desire

This is my desire, o Lord
this is my desire
this is my desire, o Lord
this is my desire

Reading: Genesis 39 v. 1-20

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So, Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing

and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

Prayer

Holy and gracious God, We come before you in stillness.

We praise you because you are the Lord of heaven and earth, the God who is high and holy, yet draws near to the broken-hearted. You are the God whose glory fills the heavens, whose holiness humbles us, whose love reaches into the darkest places, and whose light shines where all hope seems lost. There is nowhere we can go where you are absent, no valley so deep that your hand cannot reach us, no future so uncertain that it lies outside your care.

As we wait before you now, quiet our restless thoughts. Calm our anxious spirits. Open our eyes to see your glory, our ears to hear your voice, and our hearts to receive your peace.

Lord, we remember Joseph, torn from everything familiar, betrayed by those he trusted, travelling towards a land he did not choose, wondering whether he had been forgotten. We think of the loneliness he must have felt, the questions that filled his heart, the silence that surrounded him.

Many of us know something of those feelings. We know what it is to have been rejected or misunderstood. Some of us have been left behind, overlooked or made to feel that we are of little worth. Some of us carry disappointments that no one else sees. Some of us are confused as to where you are or what lies ahead.

Yet even in Egypt, you were with Joseph. Even when he could not see your purpose, you had not abandoned him. Teach us to trust that your presence is greater than our circumstances, and your love is stronger than betrayal.

Forgive us, Lord, for the times when we have doubted your goodness because life has been painful. Forgive us when we have allowed disappointment to become bitterness, fear to become despair, or hurt to become resentment.

Forgive us, too, for the ways we have been like Joseph's brothers. For the careless words that wound, the envy that divides, the prejudice that excludes, the indifference that leaves others feeling alone, and the selfishness that puts our own comfort before another's wellbeing. When we have failed to notice those who feel abandoned, or have been slow to offer kindness and welcome, have mercy upon us.

We thank you that in your great love you did not leave us to bear the weight of our sin. You sent your Son, Jesus Christ, who gave himself on the cross for us, taking upon himself the punishment our sins deserved, so that we might be forgiven, reconciled to you, and welcomed into your family. Through his death and resurrection, cleanse us, renew us, and restore us to the joy of living in your presence.

Holy Spirit, draw us ever closer to the heart of Christ. Strip away all that keeps us from you. Fill us afresh with your peace, your purity, your compassion, and your joy. May we leave this place more aware of your presence than our fears, more confident in your promises than our circumstances, and more ready to become signs of your love to those who feel forgotten.

For you are always with your people. You are our refuge and our strength. You are the God who never abandons those who trust in you. To you belong all honour, all glory, and all praise, through Jesus Christ our Lord, now and for ever.

Amen.

Message

Recently, I was preaching on Genesis 37. That's the chapter of the Bible that introduces us to Joseph and his story. It begins with the amazing 'technicolour dreamcoat', that 'coat of many colours' that was given to Joseph by his father Jacob as just one more indicator that Jacob favoured Joseph and loved him more than his brothers. And we were told that Joseph's brothers hated him because of it.

Then there were the dreams that Joseph had where all his family were bowing down before him. And, we were told, as a result his brothers hated him all the more.

Finally, that chapter ended with the brothers selling Joseph into slavery and soaking his cloak in blood so as to convince Jacob that his son had died after being attacked by a wild animal. What I wasn't prepared for, preaching on Chapter 39 today, is that it can very much be seen as a rerun of Chapter 37.

Let's break that down. Firstly, in both chapters we are given notice that God's blessing is upon Joseph. Joseph's dreams forewarn us that he was born for greatness. Then we were told that after Joseph arrived as a slave in Egypt, God continued to bless him and not just him but the entirety of Potiphar's household and operations.

Next, in each portion of the story, comes a reason for grievance. Previously it was Joseph's brothers who held a grievance against Joseph, hating him as a result of their father's favouritism. Here it is Potiphar's wife who holds her grievance because Joseph resists her sexual advances. Joseph is a slave and she was probably used to treating the slaves as she pleased. Joseph, though, stays true to his moral compass.

"My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife", Joseph says. "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

Joseph's objections are twofold. Firstly, this would be a betrayal of Potiphar, who has put his trust in Joseph. But it would also be a betrayal of God and God's values.

So, Potiphar's wife holds a grievance against Joseph because he won't sleep with her and this leads to the next feature that the two stories have in common. In both there is a false report. Previously, that false report went to Jacob who was told that Joseph had been torn to pieces by a wild animal. Now it is Potiphar's wife who, having made the sexual advances now turns things around and accuses Joseph of being the sexual predator.

And note also how Joseph's cloak is centre stage in both of these false stories. Previously it was the blood-soaked evidence that supposedly proved Joseph's violent end. Now, Potiphar's wife uses his cloak to support her untrue accusations against him.

Finally, at the end of each story Joseph loses what liberty and freedom he has. Previously, he was sold into slavery. At the end of today's reading he is thrown into prison.

The second thing I want to do is to look at six things that underlie the story.

- 1) Family jealousies, rivalries and resentments – I don't need to say too much more on this subject as I'm sure we've all seen this kind of thing raise its ugly head either within our own families or those close to us. And how many sons and daughters let bitterness take root within them because of being hurt by favouritism or perceived favouritism.
- 2) Slavery – In recent years we've been reminded that slavery isn't just a thing of the past but is still very much there in today's world. It's estimated that nearly thirty million people are victims of modern slavery on any given day and that rises to fifty million if you include forced marriages. One hundred thousand of those estimated figures are within the UK and it is common enough to have even featured on the Archers a few years back.
- 3) The misuse of power – Potiphar's wife assumed she could do what she liked with those who were slaves within their household. There are many people in our world today who suffer in many different ways at the hands of those who hold authority over them.
- 4) The destructive power of sexual desires – Let's think of Joseph's situation in a modern setting. What happens if he agrees to sleep with his employer's wife? It's the stuff of soap operas that can and often does lead to betrayal of trust; relationship breakdown; children whose family stability is shattered and, in Joseph's case, the destruction of a harmonious working environment in which far more people are blessed than merely Joseph. Sex in the right channels is God's gift and good but used in the wrong way can be so destructive.
- 5) Racism – Did you notice how quickly the race card appeared as Potiphar's wife was trying to turn people against Joseph? Suddenly he became not just a slave but a Hebrew slave.
- 6) Persecution for faith or beliefs – We can't really describe Joseph's persecution as religious persecution but it is clear that it is his ethical stance that leads to the false accusations against him and subsequently to his being thrown into prison. We can, though, say that every day people of faith and belief have a choice to make when asked to do things that run contrary to what they believe is right. Often that can lead to false accusations being made against them, often of blasphemy, or persecution at the hands of repressive regimes. Either way, prison can be a very real possibility.



You won't need me to tell you that we have been experiencing a heatwave this Summer. One result of that has been the discovery of previously unknown historical features in our fields and countryside as the ground dries out. As things have hotted up and land has dried out, aerial photography has revealed the outlines of things that were previously unseen and hidden. We have made just such a discovery in our garden. Our lawn has dried out and, as it has done so, a concrete feature has appeared that was previously hidden beneath the grass. Furthermore, it has a mysterious hole in the centre. It didn't take long, though, to realise that this was not a find of historical significance. It looks to me like the discarded base of a rotary

clothes dryer.

The things that we've just been listing - family jealousies; modern slavery; the misuse of power; sexual temptation; racism; religious persecution – these things are never far below the surface of life and if a situation heats up sufficiently in the wrong kinds of way, any of them can very easily make an appearance. We need to pray for all those affected:

- That God may protect those presently under threat in any way;
- That God may bring healing and restoration for past wrongs.

Finally, and briefly, I did say there were three parts to this sermon. The first was to look at how similar are the first two chapters of Joseph's story; the second was to look at those dark things lurking beneath the surface of everyday life. That was all mostly pretty bleak so let's now redress the balance by looking at one final similarity in the stories. Both Genesis 37 and Genesis 39 finish miserably for Joseph. First he is in slavery; then he is in prison. It's not great for him but later on he would look back and say that these things were intended for harm

but God intended them for good (Gen 50:20). As we take a step back to look at the bigger picture, we can see that both of these chapters are links in a chain that has God's hand upon it. God never left Joseph. God was always there on his journey and God needed to get Joseph from his small family setting in Canaan into the court of Pharaoh in Egypt. These turned out to be two steps along the way.

You may have encountered some miserable times in your life. Maybe right now! I can't promise you that you'll always be able to do a Joseph and see a preciseness to what God is doing. But I can promise you that, if you are a Christian, God will never leave you; God always intends blessing for you rather than misery; and God can bring good out of even the direst of circumstances.

Hymn: StF 518 Father hear the prayer we offer

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1-9wam-2Rk>

Father, hear the prayer we offer:
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength, that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.

Not for ever by still waters
Would we idly rest and stay;
But would strike the living fountains
From the rocks along our way.

Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be:
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our Guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side.

Prayer : Faithful God, As Joseph discovered in a foreign land, you are with your people wherever they are. You are the God who sees those whom others overlook, who strengthens those who feel abandoned, and who works for good even through the darkest circumstances. Trusting in your love and mercy, we bring before you the needs of your world, your Church, and all who long for your help.

Lord, we pray for our world. Where there is war, bring peace. Where there is hatred, sow reconciliation. Where there is injustice, establish righteousness. Guide the leaders of nations with wisdom, integrity and compassion. Turn hearts away from selfish ambition and the pursuit of power towards the service of the common good. Help us all to become peacemakers who reflect the love of Christ.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose lives are scarred by family jealousies, rivalries and resentments. We remember homes divided by bitterness, siblings estranged from one another, and families where hurtful words or actions have left lasting wounds. Heal broken relationships, soften hardened hearts, and give grace where forgiveness seems impossible. May your Spirit bring hope where there has been despair and reconciliation where there has been division. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are trapped in modern slavery: those who have been trafficked, exploited for labour, forced into criminal activity or sexual exploitation, or held in situations from which they cannot escape. Protect the vulnerable, expose those who profit from the suffering of others, strengthen all who work to rescue victims, and grant survivors healing, dignity and a future filled with hope.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who suffer because power has been abused. We remember victims of corruption, intimidation, violence, bullying and coercion in homes, workplaces, institutions and governments. Give courage to those who speak the truth, wisdom to those in authority, and integrity to all who hold positions of influence. Teach us to use whatever power we have not for ourselves but for the service and flourishing of others, following the example of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give strength and wisdom to those who are facing the kinds of temptation that can shatter relationships and we pray for marriages and families experiencing the pain of broken trust and unfaithfulness. Bring comfort to those whose relationships have been damaged by adultery or betrayal. Grant repentance where there has been wrongdoing, healing where there has been deep hurt, and wisdom to those seeking the best way forward. Surround children and others caught in the consequences of family breakdown with your love and care. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who experience racism or discrimination because of their ethnicity or nationality. We thank you that every person is made in your image and loved by you. Challenge prejudice wherever it is found—in society, in our communities and in our own hearts. Help your Church to be a place of genuine welcome, justice and belonging, where the diversity of your kingdom is celebrated. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We remember our brothers and sisters across the world who face hostility, discrimination or persecution because they follow Jesus and strive to live by your values. Strengthen those who worship in secret, encourage those who are imprisoned for their faith, comfort those who have lost homes, livelihoods or loved ones, and keep them steadfast in hope. May their witness inspire your Church throughout the world to remain faithful and courageous. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Strengthen your Church to be a living sign of your kingdom. Make us a people who welcome the stranger, defend the vulnerable, speak for the voiceless and offer hope to those who feel forgotten. Where Joseph remained faithful in difficult circumstances, help us to remain faithful in ours, trusting that you are with us and that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer : Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: Hymns and Psalms 769 God is working his purpose out

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cr3goa3DXsw>

(although notice that this includes an extra verse (v.2) not included in Hymns and Psalms)

God is working His purpose out
As year succeeds to year;
God is working His purpose out,
And the time is drawing near;
Nearer and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.

March we forth in the strength of God
With the banner of Christ unfurled,
That the light of the glorious gospel of truth
May shine throughout the world:
Fight we the fight with sorrow and sin
To set their captives free,
That the earth may be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.

What can we do to work God's work,
To prosper and increase
The harmony of all the world,
The reign of the Prince of peace?
What can we do to hasten the time,
The time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea?

All we can do is nothing worth
Unless God blesses the deed;
Vainly we hope for the harvest tide
Till God gives life to the seed;
Yet nearer and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.