

Ordinary 20 Year A 2020 Gen 45:1-15; Rom 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matt 15:21-28 **Scott MALCOLM**

Lindsay and I rowed. Mum had died and we were winding up her estate. She was living in a unit in Whangarei, which we brought with her, from our Grandmother, her mother's estate. She didn't have much money. Lindsay, my brother, wanted to buy it, it was my job to work out a deal for Janet and I, and my much younger half-brother, who also had a share.

This was a fraught experience and everything went wrong. Finally my relationship with Lindsay went dark over a phone call where the air was turned blue, purple, then black! I hung up and didn't speak to him for a year or two.

Funnily enough, it wasn't as traumatic as you might imagine. As the elder brother I had carried too much responsibility after our parent's divorce, and I needed the blow up to move me on as an adult.

I suspect it was the same for him.

But we didn't speak for a while. Then it seemed like time for a change, and we sent one another birthday texts and messages, and soon things were back where they were before.

But life is never simple, and so that those of you who have difficult family relationships don't think mine all sweetness and light...

I have 2 other brothers, half-brothers, a little like Joseph, but not as many.

Due to varying circumstances, which those with family difficulties will understand, I have little contact with my other two brothers, it's not something I'm pleased about, but the energy to deal with those situations isn't with me at the moment.

Family acceptance is a beautiful thing. The Joseph story highlights that. But it's not always realised quite so nicely.

Along time ago, the church experienced a period of short lived, but extreme persecution; people's faith was pushed to the limit. The decision was whether they would remain faithful to Christ or worship the Roman Emperor as god. Remaining faithful meant being imprisoned, or worse, many went to the lions or were treated terribly, but many more recanted and lived the years of persecution in relative safety and peace.

These persecutions ended after a few years, and the church became more accepted in society. Those imprisoned were released and things came steadily back to normal ... accept for one thing ... those who recanted, including many bishops and elders, wanted to return, and be reinstated as leaders. As you can imagine, there were views on whether this was appropriate or a right thing to allow.

In some places they were accepted, but in many, they were not.

Family acceptance is a beautiful thing, but it's not an easy thing, regarding the "whole family of God", which as far as Paul is concerned, includes those of Jewish faith.

In 1990 Penny Jamieson was the first Anglican woman bishop in the world. She was Bishop of Dunedin for 14 years.

That was 30 years ago. For nearly two thousand years the church has ignored, sidelined and made light the ministry and contribution of women and in some places still does. It seems incredible, that a movement, beginning with stories like the one we read today should have fallen in to such a state.

A woman comes to Jesus, not a Jewish woman, but a religiously dirty and unclean, Canaanite woman. She comes making a racket, she is shouting. Jesus ignores her, as the Jewish religious custom required, the church largely maintains, but she is clever and has great faith. So she keeps at him.

Jesus is so impressed with her, in spite of what anyone might say, he restores her families' health and well-being. She, as the gospel later resolves, is also family.

Like Penny Jamieson and all women who have served and been neglected, felt called to ministry, and never been given a chance, are also, family.

Family acceptance is a beautiful thing, but it can take longer than we'd like.

Family acceptance is a beautiful thing.

But it's not always realized nicely, or easily, or quickly.

But, it can be done, and as church we are reminded that we are family too, and called to work at making acceptance happen.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.