

Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent, March 12, 2017

Solemn Evensong

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Year 1: Genesis 41:14–45; Mark 3:31–4:9; Matthew 13: 31–33, 44–46*

In this lectionary year, we started reading Genesis at Evensong on the First Sunday after the Epiphany. We began at the beginning with the first creation story. We've had two Sundays away from Genesis. We picked up Genesis last Monday with what Genesis calls the story of the family of Jacob, but it's really the story of Joseph. And that's where we are tonight. During the fourth week of Lent, we will move from Genesis to Exodus. But this year, like most years, we will end up hearing almost all of Genesis through the Sundays and weekdays at Evening Prayer.

I always find what is left out of the lectionary interesting. Genesis chapter 10 is omitted. It lists the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. It would be good passage for Bible study—but not for Evening Prayer. Most of you know I do put passages back in when possible—it's permitted to lengthen, but not shorten the appointed lessons. One example of an addition: it seemed important to me to include the passage about Abraham's second marriage and the children of that marriage, the children by his

concubines, how Abraham provided for his sons—not daughters, and how Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury their father.<sup>1</sup> The passage also names Ishmael's twelve sons who are here called princes—God had promised Abraham that Ishmael that they would be princes. Isaac was the child of the covenant, but Ishmael was also a child of promise. I'm sorry the passage is read on a Monday, and there's no practical way to hear it on Sunday.

So I thought tonight I would look briefly at what we hear at Evensong and to think even more briefly about what we leave out.

Again, on the First Sunday after the Epiphany we hear the first creation story, the seven day story. Adam and Eve get Monday night. By the Second Sunday, Noah is going into the ark and the flood that will endure for forty days is destroying all living creatures because of the wickedness of humankind. By the Third Sunday, Abraham, who has left Haran along with his nephew Lot, is asking Lot to choose where he will go next. Lot selects the area around Sodom. Abraham heads in the other direction. By the Fourth Sunday, Abraham is

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 25:1–18.

speaking with the Lord about whether the Lord will destroy the righteous along with the wicked in Sodom. The Lord sounds merciful, when the Lord says, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.”<sup>2</sup> Yet many cities and towns have been destroyed when far, far more than ten righteous are in them.

On the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Abraham’s servant brings Sarah’s niece Rebekah from her home in Haran to Isaac. Genesis says, “Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her.”<sup>3</sup> It’s one of two times marital love is mentioned in Genesis—but I’m not sure at all she loved him. By the Sixth Sunday, Isaac and Rebekah’s sons are grown, and Jacob has found a wife, the daughter of his mother’s brother, his first cousin Rachel. We hear the only other reference of a husband loving a wife in Genesis: “So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.”<sup>4</sup> Jacob, who has cheated his brother out of his birthright, ends up being cheated by his uncle. He has to work another

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 18:32.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 24:67.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 29:20.

seven years for the woman he loves, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin.

Joseph and the coat of many colors is one of many Old Testament stories that made me afraid as a child. I'm still not comfortable with the innocent being locked up—and I don't know why there isn't more outrage whenever we learn another person has been freed from jail by DNA evidence, that has been locked away for years, is finally tested.<sup>5</sup>

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann in his commentary on Genesis, when he gets to the story of Joseph, the one who wore a robe of many colors, remarks that Joseph's story is a new beginning. Brueggemann says this new beginning shapes the narrative of the rest of the book Genesis<sup>6</sup> and also the narrative of the next book of the Bible, Exodus, the story of how the Hebrew people left the land of Egypt and came to a new home.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See National Registry of Exonerations:

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982) 298.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

For me, the most powerful passage in the story is not tonight’s lesson, but the story read, not this Tuesday, but next Tuesday night. It begins, “Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him; and he cried, ‘Make every one go out from me.’ So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph; is my father still alive?’ ”<sup>8</sup> My other favorite verse in the Joseph story is when God tells Jacob in a final vision, “I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.”<sup>9</sup>

The Third Week of Lent is really good week to read Evening Prayer.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 45:1–3.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 46:4.