

Hidden in plain sight

Heather Smith *reflects on* Genesis 45:1-15

Could you forgive someone who sold you into slavery? Joseph's brothers had a lot to answer for, but he didn't hold it against them. Even though things had turned out well for him, it had taken a long time to reach that point, and his story included false accusations and a lengthy period in prison. Although the false accusations were not his brothers' fault, it would have been easy to hold them responsible because they were the reason he was in Egypt in the first place.

We might think of Joseph's story as something that happened a long time ago – another time, another culture – but people are being trafficked today all over the world. Many end up “hidden in plain sight” in the West – in nail bars or car washes. For most, the story does not have a happy ending like Joseph's. There are no reunions or fabulous job opportunities. But it does not mean that God does not care.

Pharaoh's cupbearer, who met Joseph in prison, facilitated his release. Do we pay enough attention to the plight of those around us, to help them escape from whatever is entrapping them, be it modern slavery or other situations that imprison? Can we do something to help to restore mental and spiritual health? And do we ourselves need reconciliation and forgiveness to enable us to become whole again? ☺



God of those who are disadvantaged and persecuted, make us alert to the suffering of others, and brave enough to give practical help. Give us compassion to work with those who are wounded, to bring them to wholeness. Amen.

Cities of the Bible

Philippi

by Caroline Fletcher

Philippi was named by Philip II, Alexander the Great's father. In New Testament times it lay within ancient Macedonia, but today it is part of Greece. Philippi was a Roman colony under Roman law and governed by two magistrates (Acts 16:20-22).

The apostle Paul first visited Philippi on his second missionary

journey after being directed to Macedonia by a vision (Acts 16:9). Philippi lay on a significant Roman road, so it was a good place to begin building a Christian presence. The first to come to Christ was Lydia, who met Paul beside a river outside the city. She's often called the first European convert. Paul and his companion Silas were beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, too. Despite this treatment, Paul maintained a deep affection for the city, as his warm letter to the Philippians testifies.

Today ancient Philippi lies in ruins, but its rich archaeological remains are a UNESCO world heritage site. ☺

Summer holidays

by Andrew Lyon

There is a tradition in Celtic Christianity to speak of the “thin places”, that is, holy spots, where the veil between this world and the next seems particularly thin. A sense of the world to come is almost discernible in these places, as though one might commune here with those who have gone before us, or even cross back and forth.

A sense of place is important for our spirituality. Nature itself, as part of God's creation, is, as the psalms tell us, already singing for joy before the Lord. Even certain locations seem sometimes to hold within themselves a memory of events that have taken place there, not only in physical marks, but also in the atmosphere.

As you travel during the summer months, be conscious of place, and your interaction with it. Listen to what each place has to teach you, and pray for God's blessing upon it. ☺

“Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them.”

Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015), author and speaker