

Wednesday April 29 th	Genesis 30	53 Oh, greatly blest the people are
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Today's hymn is the Scottish metrical version of Psalm 89.

1. O greatly blest the people are
The joyful sound that know;
In brightness of thy face, O Lord,
They ever on shall go.
2. They in thy Name shall all the day
Rejoice exceedingly;
And in thy righteousness shall they
Exalted be on high.
3. For God is our defence; and he
To us doth safety bring:
The Holy One of Israel
Is our almighty King.

This Psalm is a hymn of praise to God - a doxology - for God's love to his covenant people. The opening words remind us of the blessing of Aaron (in Numbers 6:24) which asks the Lord to bless us, and make his face shine upon us. The 'joyful sound' or 'festal shout' may refer to the group of exultant pilgrims or worshippers at the Temple. The Psalmist, and we ourselves, can rejoice that God is our King and our helper.

Here it is to the tune *Newington*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZpqzkUDmuM>

*Today's reading is **Genesis 30** Jacob's family complete
When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or I'll die!'*

Jacob became angry with her and said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?'

Then she said, 'Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her.'

So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, and she became pregnant and bore him a son. Then Rachel said, 'God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son.' Because of this she named him Dan. Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, 'I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won.' So she named him Naphtali. When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, 'What good fortune!' So she named him Gad.

Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, 'How happy I am! The women will call me happy.' So she named him Asher.

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.'

But she said to her, 'Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?'

'Very well,' Rachel said, 'he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes.'

So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. 'You must sleep with me,' she said. 'I have hired you with my son's mandrakes.' So he slept with her that night.

God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, 'God has rewarded me for

giving my servant to my husband.' So she named him Issachar.

Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, 'God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honour, because I have borne him six sons.' So she named him Zebulun.

Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, 'God has taken away my disgrace.' She named him Joseph, and said, 'May the Lord add to me another son.'

After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, 'Send me on my way so that I can go back to my own homeland. Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you.'

But Laban said to him, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you.' He added, 'Name your wages, and I will pay them.'

Jacob said to him, 'You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?'

'What shall I give you?' he asked.

'Don't give me anything,' Jacob replied. 'But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: let me go through all your flocks today

and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-coloured lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-coloured, will be considered stolen.'

'Agreed,' said Laban. 'Let it be as you have said.' That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-coloured lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.

Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-coloured animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so that they would mate near the branches, but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to

Jacob. In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Jacob's family of a daughter and twelve sons is now complete. We may question the morality of having two wives and two handmaids as the mothers of his children, but ancient customs could be very different from ours.

And also very different is the way that Jacob became rich: using a sort of selective breeding method, he turned the tables on Laban and became more wealthy than him. We can see this in two ways; either simply as Jacob up to his old tricks again, or in a strange way, God blessing and prospering him. William Cowper was right in the words of his hymn: 'God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform'.

In any case, the stage was set for the emergence of the tribes of Israel. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Prayer

(Rt Rev Colin Sinclair, Moderator of the General Assembly)

Lord, we are those who journey.

And who find that journey hard today.

We are those who journey.

And long to find our hope renewed.

Lord, whether in our own company or with companions beside us, We journey on. Whether sure, or unsure, as to our journey's end, Come beside us through the risen Lord.

Lord, we pray for others;

For carers of the living and of the dying;

For the bereaved and for the anxious;

For those fearing loss of work and of business.

Lord, we pray for scientists and researchers;

For those seeking to understand the challenge we face; For those creating potential vaccines;

For those advising decision-makers.

Lord, we pray for those who shape our common life:

In local Councils and in Scottish Government.

And in the Government of the United Kingdom.

Grant to them wisdom, compassion and understanding.

Lord, we pray for your Kingdom to come.

And for your will to be done, On earth.

As it is in heaven. Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Amen.

At 7pm tonight, you are invited to join our fellow Christians in North Berwick & District Association of Churches, in this prayer:

For all that is good in life, thank you,

For the love of family and friends, thank you,

For the kindness of good neighbour and Samaritan stranger, thank you.

May those who are vulnerable, hungry or homeless, experience support,

May those who are sick, know healing,

May those who are anxious or bereaved, sense comfort.

Bless and guide political leaders and decision-makers, with wisdom,

Bless and guide health workers and key workers, with strength and well-being, Bless and guide each one of us, as we adapt to a new way of living.

And may the light shining from our windows, across road and wynd, glen and ben, kyle and isle,

be reflected in our hearts and hands and hopes.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, **Amen.**