

Reflection: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28. Matthew 14: 22-33. Romans 10:5-15. “Theme: “God saves the vulnerable.”

#### Introduction:

As a former volunteer surf lifeguard, I have witnessed several rescues in the formidable surf at Karioitahi beach, whereby people who had become vulnerable needed rescuing. On one occasion, I was part of a rescue of a father and young daughter, who were desperately plucked from the surf by the lifeguards. Dramatically the scene unfolded. The daughter, of about ten years of age was rescued and carried to the waters edge. As she tried to make sense of the ordeal she turned, only to witness other lifeguards frantically attempting to reach her father who had drifted even further out to sea and was vulnerable to the outgoing tide. Thankfully, I can report, it was a desirable outcome with both eventually being brought back to safety. God is very much in the business of saving the vulnerable!

#### Body:

In focusing our attention on today's bible readings from the lectionary in Genesis and Matthew, and in considering the circumstances in which Joseph and Peter found themselves, it becomes apparent that both Joseph and Peter at the time, also appeared particularly vulnerable. Joseph was betrayed by his siblings and sold into slavery, while Peter boldly sought to claim his faith in Jesus by attempting to walk on the water despite being caught in a harrowing storm on the lake. Both Joseph and Peter it seems were somewhat impulsive in their actions. Joseph had foolishly given in to his own pride and stirred up feelings of jealousy, rage and bitterness amongst his siblings which resulted in his brothers seeking revenge on him, while Peter attempted to claim with conviction that he had in fact witnessed Jesus walking on the water, despite having doubts which he could not hide. In referring to Witney T. Kuniholm, author of the 'Essential one hundred' bible reading challenge companion book, Peter had always been a 'ready, fire, aim!' kind of a guy. On this occasion, Peter was also anxious, fearful, doubtful and insecure as he attempted to converse with Jesus who walked toward him on the water. Peter and Joseph were people of vulnerability. But, what becomes more apparent is that in their moments of vulnerability God reached out to them. It was not in Joseph and Peter appearing truly confident that God reached out to help them. God stepped into their lives, their circumstances, to help them at a time in which they were particularly vulnerable. Not just their vulnerability to circumstances, but also a vulnerability to their own character flaws.

Our lives too, can reflect the struggles and conflicts with our peers, and the challenge to love our neighbour as ourself. But, here we discover the good news regarding God and his people. Despite betrayal and all of Joseph's afflictions and heart break, God restored Joseph's emotions and his family relationships despite the dysfunction within his family. Joseph also found the favour of God in the sight of his adversaries. Eventually, God worked through Joseph and his circumstances and brought Joseph to a place of great influence whereby a nation was built. Ultimately, it was God who promoted Joseph to a position of authority and accountability and through him saved the nation from the threat of famine.

We may relate to the experience that Peter encountered when we sit in church and confess Jesus as Lord amongst our peers, and yet, we may later be affected by the storms of calamity and the associated feelings of uncertainty, which may cause us to question “will God really save us?” Listen to Peter's cry to Jesus as he looked at the storm, then panicked and began to sink. “Save me Lord!” There was little confidence or faith displayed by Peter in that moment, simply sheer panic. Verse 31 of Matthew's gospel tells us “at once Jesus reached out and

grabbed hold of him and said 'how little faith you have! Why did you doubt?' Jesus responded to Peter's frailty. Jesus reached out to Peter and saved him from sinking. Despite Peter having doubts and little faith, Jesus didn't reject or abandon him. In addressing the concept of God's salvation for believers and with reference to Romans, chapter 10, from verse 13 it reads "Everyone who calls out to the Lord for help will be saved." Jesus is later quoted in Matthew's gospel from chapter 16, verse 18 as informing Peter that he would later equip Peter for a greater purpose -to build his church. The same God who has proven to be faithful, is both willing and able to reach and save you and I, because we too are vulnerable. We are vulnerable to circumstances that invoke fear in us, and vulnerable to our own character flaws, including a lack of faith or willingness to believe that without a shadow of doubt, God will save us.

#### Conclusion:

It is in our vulnerability that we too can discover God's presence, compassion and mercy. God invites us to come to him, and seek his throne of grace because we are weak, not because we are strong. It is not because we are spiritually strong, but because we are spiritually weak that we may truly know a deeper fellowship with God. It is in this place of acknowledgement and in our vulnerability of weakness that our fear can be stripped away, because God is both able and willing to save us. I like Jesus' response to the disciples when they first appeared terrified, believing they had witnessed a ghost approaching them on the lake: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid (14:27). Ultimately, it is God who walks with us through the storms of our lives, as he did with Joseph and Peter. Thanks be to God. To God be the glory, now and forever more, Amen.