Tatjana Ljujić, *Confronting Past Sins: A Call to Racial Justice*

Genesis 42.1-25
1 Corinthians 10.1-24

27th July 2025
6th Sunday after Trinity

In the passage from Genesis we heard this afternoon, Jacob's sons come to Egypt in search of food during a famine. They do not recognise that the governor standing before them is none other than Joseph, their own brother, whom they had once sold into slavery. But he recognises them. Rather than reveal himself, Joseph tests them: he accuses them of being spies, demands they bring their youngest brother to prove their honesty, and detains one of them as a guarantee. He also returns their money in secret — a gesture that unsettles them and deepens the long-suppressed guilt that has now been awakened.

This moment is the beginning of a process of reckoning and reconciliation. It follows betrayal, suffering, and power reversed. And it sets in motion a painful but transformative journey — not just for Joseph, but for his brothers, who must face what they have done.

It's a story of memory and justice. Of power used not for revenge, but to uncover the truth and make space for repentance. And, ultimately, it is a story of restoration.

But that restoration only becomes possible when Joseph's brothers begin to confront the truth of their actions. 'Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen', they lament [Genesis 42.21]. For perhaps the first time, they begin to see clearly what they have done. They remember the pain they inflicted. They name it. And that is where change begins.

We need that kind of remembering and truth-telling today.

For too long, the story of the Church of England and the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans has been only half-told. Yet it is all there — in our records, our ledgers, our memorials, and our theology.

Whether through Church bodies that received donations or income from the economy of enslavement, or through profits from investments made by Church institutions or individual leaders in slave-labour-operated plantations — the wealth flowed into our city's parishes and into this cathedral. The Church was not merely a passive bystander, but a beneficiary and an enabler. And it was the Church's moral and theological endorsement that helped legitimise the system.

And like Joseph's brothers, we have long avoided recognising our sibling. We have not wanted to see who stands before us. We have buried the truth of what was done — so that some of our ancestors could eat while others starved, live free while others were shackled.

The *All God's Children* exhibition here at the Cathedral is part of the work of facing that history. It does not let us forget. It holds up the lives and voices of African and Afro-Caribbean people — men, women, and children whose dignity was denied but not destroyed. It invites us to see clearly and truthfully what was done, and to begin the work of repair.

And that work is theological. It is not simply about historical awareness — it is about discipleship. For the call to follow Christ is not a call to comfort. It is a call to justice, to truth, and to the hard work of reparation.

In our New Testament reading today, Paul reminds the Corinthians that even those who walked with God in the wilderness fell into idolatry, injustice, and division. 'Do not become idolaters as some of them did', pleads Paul [1 Corinthians 10.7]. Do not presume that proximity to the holy means we are immune from sin. The passage is full of warnings — because the Corinthians, like us, are tempted to believe they can share in Christ's table while ignoring the demands of Christ's body.

The Holy Communion we shared this morning reminds us that we are joined not only with God but with one another — with all our human siblings, including those whom history tried to erase. Paul writes, 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' [1 Corinthians 10.17]. That unity is not sentimental. It is demanding. It calls us to reckon with how we have treated our siblings. It asks us: what have you done to the body of Christ?

Reconciliation, in biblical terms, is never cheap. There is no restoration without recognition. No justice without truth. No healing without confronting the wound. When Joseph's brothers stand before him, they do not yet know who he is. But they begin to remember. They begin to see. And that is the beginning of their transformation.

So what might that transformation look like for us?

It starts with humility. We must listen — truly listen — to those whose lives have borne the cost of our history. We must name what has been done: the wealth built on human suffering, the theology used to justify dehumanisation, the silence that allowed injustice to endure.

It continues with repentance. Not performative gestures, but genuine turning. Turning away from defensiveness. Turning towards repair. Reparative justice is not an optional extra, but a gospel imperative. The money returned in Joseph's story is symbolic of something deeper: restitution, rebalancing, a sign that the past is not being ignored.

And it leads to communion. Not a quick fix, but a real, renewed relationship grounded in truth, shaped by justice, and open to grace. When Joseph finally reveals himself, he does so through tears. Reconciliation is costly, shatteringly emotive — and holy.

Siblings in Christ, we have inherited a story — both biblical and historical — that calls us to reckon with betrayal, to tell the truth, and to seek reconciliation. Our reading from Genesis shows us what happens when we fail to listen to the cries

of our brothers and sisters. But it also shows us what happens when we do: new life, new hope, and the possibility of a restored family.

May we have the courage to look clearly at our past, the honesty to confess our part in it, and the grace to trust that God’s justice leads to healing and restoration.

Amen.