



The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday, August 16th, 2020

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Sermon Transcript

On Never Doubting God's Presence In Our Lives

Three weeks ago in Genesis 29 you heard the Old Testament story of how Jacob found his wife - um two wives - Leah and Rachael and so began the continuation of the story of God's promise to Jacob's father Abraham – the covenant that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in heaven.

And 2 weeks ago in Genesis 32 you heard that after Jacob had left Haran with his wives and his flocks, he had an encounter with God – a wrestling match as it were. Jacob ended up with a strained hip, but God blessed him and gave him a new name, 'Israel.'

Last week you heard in Genesis 37 the early part of the story of Joseph the 11th son of Jacob and his father's favourite by the way. This is an amazing story – the kind that dreams and musicals are built on.

This week our reading is from Genesis 45 and it is the last one in Genesis before we move on to Exodus next week. We hear the final story of Joseph but all we have got so far, is highlights. So in case you are curious about what really went on back in those biblical days that was so important that it had to be included in 20 chapters of the Torah, I thought I would fill you in.

Joseph was born while Jacob was still working for Laban and it was then that Jacob decided that he would leave Haran and return home to his father

reconciling with his brother Esau on the way. Growing up, Joseph was kind of a pain. He was the 11th son born in the family but the first son to be born to Rachael whom Jacob loved. So Jacob, loved him more than all his other sons. And to his discredit, Jacob openly favoured Joseph and one time gave him an expensive and exclusive gift in the form of a multicolored coat. This incurred the jealousy and hatred of his brothers, and we can understand why.

Joseph had dreams, and in each one it turns out that he's at the center, shining with importance. Having a dream is one thing, but telling it to your brothers is another, especially when you know it's going to make them even more jealous. Joseph was either naïve or malicious, for he related his dreams to his brothers with great gusto. Joseph even succeeded in getting his father angry at him. "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" Jacob asks in a huff

The older brothers finally get their chance for revenge one day when Jacob sends Joseph to check on them while they are away with the flocks. Their plan is to kill Joseph and make it look like the work of a wild animal. Interestingly, the oldest brother, Reuben, wants to spare Joseph's life and bring him back home. But he was outvoted and the brothers take Joseph, remove his "richly ornamented" robe, and throw him into a deep cistern. After some heated discussion however, they decided that, instead of killing him, they will sell him into slavery.

So ends Joseph' life as the favoured son. And so far there isn't a hint of God's participation.

Joseph is sold into slavery to a band of Midianite merchants who in turn sell him in Egypt to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Soon Potiphar begins to see the unique faith, wisdom and skills this young Hebrew slave possessed. As a result, Potiphar puts Joseph in charge of his entire household and everything he owns. So, it seems that maybe God was keeping an eye on Joseph after all and in turn Potiphar's household is blessed in abundance.

Joseph' status had now changed even further. He had moved from being 'favorite son' to 'favorite slave' and was now Potiphar's 'favorite Executive'

As Joseph began to prosper in Potiphar's household, a new and serious challenge was building up. Potiphar's wife begins to be attracted to the handsome Joseph

and tries to seduce him. Soon, he was facing consistent sexual harassment at the workplace

Eventually, when she thought she had trapped him into a compromising situation, Joseph was forced to run away because he did not want to either hurt his boss or offend God.. As a result, Potiphar's wife exacted her full revenge on him by falsely accusing him of trying to molest her. Because of her false accusation, Joseph was unjustly thrown into prison!

See what you have been missing!

However, Joseph now found favor with the prison warden, who in turn made him the chief Administrator for all management operations and labor control in the prison!

Joseph's status had changed once again. He had gone from being 'favorite son' to 'favorite slave', to 'favorite executive', and was now the 'favorite prisoner'!

As the story continues in Chapter 40, the king's chief cupbearer and chief baker were thrown into the same prison as Joseph because of an assassination attempt on the king. It was there that they came under Joseph's influence. Sometime later, both these men had dreams which troubled them until Joseph interpreted them for them. The end result was that the chief cupbearer was restored back to his position, while the chief baker was executed, exactly as Joseph predicted through one of those dreams. Joseph then pleads with the chief cupbearer to speak to the king on his behalf, once he is released, stating his innocence to the accusation brought against him.

Sadly, "the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him". In fact, his forgetfulness lasted 2 long years! However, Joseph was learning to be fruitful through the affliction of being forgotten.

Thankfully, Pharaoh had a couple of bad dreams two years later and none of his wise men could interpret the dreams. That jogged the chief cupbearer's memory and he recommended Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams to the king, and the rest is history.

After interpreting the king's dreams accurately, Joseph was released from prison. The dream was a warning from God of seven years of great abundance followed

by seven years of severe famine. Pharaoh made Joseph second in command over Egypt to lead the harvesting and storage of food during the years of plenty in order to prepare for the years of famine

Joseph's status had changed once again from being 'favorite son' to 'favorite slave', to favorite Executive', to 'favorite prisoner', now at the age of 30, favorite Governor'

Where did Joseph acquire the skills needed for this massive operation? It was during the 13 years he spent in Potiphar's house and in prison, as he faced the afflictions of being rejected, falsely accused and being forgotten.

The wonderful story of how Joseph's brothers were instructed to go to Egypt for food when the country was two years into the famine and how Joseph toyed with them while giving them the food they need takes up 6 chapters of Genesis – 42 - 48. A great read.

Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery and finally told them that the "governor" they were dealing with was really their brother Joseph. And he said this to them: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives".

Bottom line, the twelve tribes of Israel survived the seven years of famine and continued on through history to eventually give the world the Messiah - because of Joseph's hardship

The story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 is a good illustration of how God works through bad things to accomplish good. Joseph suffered unjustly. It would be natural to ask "God, where are You? Why are you allowing this to happen to me?"

Henri Nouwen, the much loved priest and spiritual director wrote: I know that true joy comes from letting God love me the way God wants, whether it is through illness or health, failure or success, poverty or wealth, rejection or praise. It is hard for me to say, "I shall gratefully accept everything, Lord, that pleases you. Let your will be done." But I know that when I truly believe my Father is pure love, it will become increasingly possible to say these words from the heart

We should never doubt God's presence in our lives. These great stories in the Old Testament show that God's silence is not an indication of inactivity or not caring,

but that God is active behind the scenes working to bring good out of our bad experiences. The Hebrews knew that and that is why they like to tell their stories and that is why we should keep that in mind when we live out our lives and tell our own stories.