

The Joseph saga. Last week we learned that Joseph grew up one of 12 brothers. His brothers were jealous of him and sold him into slavery, and he ended up in Egypt. Joseph was one of the youngest brothers. How many of you grew up the youngest in your family? (Show of hands.) I did. How many grew up the oldest? (Show of hands.) I am not going to ask for the middle children because no one cares about you (laughter). Just kidding. But it's true.

Joseph is sold into slavery and ends up in Egypt. Joseph, a Bedouin, living in large tents that were moved from place to place following the flocks; Joseph that lived in the desert, the rocky ground. When Joseph's brothers threw him into the cistern, it was dry; there was no water. Joseph now lives along the Nile River, wider than three of these sanctuaries. A river that floods a couple of times a year. It floods into the fields, floods into the houses and the streets, bringing fertile soil. Joseph that grew up in the hills and valleys of Judea now lives on the flat plain of Egypt. Joseph the country boy now lives in the city. Joseph who always lived in a tent now lives in a house. Joseph sees a new moon rise up over the Nile delta; everything looks different.

As Joseph became a slave of Pontiphar, Pontiphar saw that God was with him and was blessing him, so he put him in charge of everything: his entire household, all of the other servants and slaves, all of his business. He put Joseph in charge of everything, except for his wife.

The story tells us that Joseph was strikingly handsome. In fact, one tradition says that God had this much (Pastor Allan spreads his arms) beauty to give to men, and he gave half of it to Joseph. And from that time forward, he has been giving out little pieces of the other half to men. This explains a lot, doesn't it? (Laughter.) Joseph was strikingly handsome. George Clooney handsome; Brad Pitt handsome; Johnny Depp handsome; Clive Owen, for those that like the dark and mysterious, the bad boy handsome. Joseph was strikingly handsome. He was running the household, he was running the whole business, and after a while, Pontiphar's wife found Joseph strikingly handsome. She desired Joseph. She started to come on to Joseph, and Joseph said, no, no. How can I violate the trust of your husband who has put me charge of everything, everything in his household and his business, except for you? How can I sin against God?

One afternoon Joseph was going about the task of the household, and Pontiphar's wife called him into her bedroom. She grabbed a hold of his coat, and Joseph did the right thing: He ran. He ran so fast in fact that he ran right out of his coat, and she was stuck there holding only the coat of the handsome Joseph. He ran out of the house, ran out to the fields, and there she stood, a woman scorned. She

cried out, I have been betrayed. Look, I have the evidence. This slave has come into my bedroom. He came on to me, and I have the evidence. I have his coat in my hands

When her husband came home, she said, look, here. This slave that you brought, the foreigner that you brought into our house has done this to me, and I have the evidence here in my room. Here is his coat.

Now think about it, Joseph has lost a coat twice (laughter) and it hasn't turned out that good either time. This time when he loses his coat, Pontiphar has no choice but to call the guards and put Joseph in prison for his crime. Joseph lost a coat twice. He lost the coat of many colors, the coat of a Bedouin shepherd. The coat that showed his father loved him the most. He lost the coat of a head slave in Egypt, the fine linen of Egypt. The coat that said his master trusted him more than anyone else. Sometimes we need to lose that what makes us comfortable for God to use us. I don't know why that is. Joseph had to lose that coat that said he was the favorite son. Joseph had to lose that coat that said he was the head slave for God to use him.

So Joseph ends up in jail, in prison, in a dungeon in a foreign city far from his family, far from anybody he knows. He is in prison falsely accused. And what does the story tell us? You know what's coming, right? But there in jail God was still with Joseph. Ain't that great? You know, that and \$1.50 will get you a cup of coffee at Sheetz. There in jail God was still with Joseph. He reached out in kindness to Joseph. He put him on good terms with the head jailer. You know, that's the way to wake up in the morning, hoping God will make you best friends with the head jailer. Can you picture the head jailer? Do you know what this guy looks like? He's sort of got the limp. You can picture what the head jailer looked like. He didn't get much of the beauty God had left after he gave a lot to Joseph. What kind of blessing is this?

But there in jail God was still with Joseph. He reached out in kindness to him. He put him on good terms with the head jailer. The head jailer put Joseph in charge of the prisoners. Joseph ended up managing the whole operation. The head jailer gave Joseph free rein, never even checked on him because God was with him. Whatever Joseph did, God made sure it worked out for the best. I don't know who it worked out the best for: for Joseph; for the head jailer that now didn't have to do anything; for the other prisoners; for the pharaoh that he had the best run prison on the west coast of the Nile River.

Here is Joseph, someone that had never lived in a house, and he was running a house. Here is Joseph that had never been a prison, and he is running a prison. Sometimes I have wondered if Joseph was the wisest of the wise or if he was the first Forest Gump to live. I really don't know. I don't know if he was so wise that people saw in him something that they could put everything in his hands, or if he was so clueless that he didn't know any better. Maybe it was a combination of both. But

somehow Joseph was faithful wherever he was: as a shepherd; as the head slave in a house; and as the best friend of the head jailer in prison.

Picture your life. It's perfect, isn't it? You got the perfect job, don't you? You have the perfect family; perfect house, nothing wrong in the house, nothing to fix; best friends, the best friends in the world. Isn't your life perfect like my life is perfect? No? Not always, huh? How much of our time is caught up in thinking or praying or dreaming that we just need to change that stuff around us? You know, if I had a better job, it would be easier to get up on Monday morning. If I didn't have this teacher in school but had that teacher, I would be getting better grades. If my family -- we made it through the holidays -- if they could just get along a little bit better, my life would be better. If I had better friends, I would be a better person. If we just had a couple more dollars to rub together, everything would be fine.

So much of our life is caught up in trying to change all those circumstances, all those situations around us, and when that all changes, when God changes all that, then we'll be ready to be a better person, right? This is how we think. If God can get all of this stuff around us fixed right, then we can step into it and be the best Christian that we can be.

The story of Joseph tells us that Joseph was blessed and God was with him right there in the jail, right there in the place God put him. Nothing changed around Joseph. He wasn't miraculously released. The Supreme Court didn't overturn the decision and he was let out of prison. Nothing in his life changed, except Joseph. You see, we spend all of our time worrying about all of this stuff outside here, and if this would just change, then we would change inside. But that is not how God works. God changes us inside, and that's the only thing that can change everything outside us.

God changes us. God was with Joseph in prison. God made sure that everything worked out for the best. It didn't say God made everything work out exactly how Joseph would want it. It said God made sure everything worked out for the best.

God is ready to bless you. God stands ready to be with you right where you are: right in your job, you're the only person there; right in your home; right in the midst of your family; right with your friends. God stands ready to bless you right where you are, and if you can accept that blessing in God's presence, then you will be changed, and everything around you will be changed as well.

One of my favorite Far Side cartoons, if you remember the Far Side, well, they had a number of them that were depicted in Hell. They have one that I love where they say, Welcome, Maestro, here is your room, and there's a room full of banjo players that they put the maestro in. One of my favorites is there are two devils standing there with their pitchforks, and there is a little man coming by pushing a wheelbarrow of rocks. He has sweat coming down his forehead, and he's just

whistling a happy tune. And the devils say, you know, I don't think we're getting through to that one (laughter).

Somehow the world never got through to Joseph. Somehow he never realized that he was sold into slavery; that he was in a foreign land; that he was in prison falsely accused. The world just never got through to him, but God did. May God get through to you this week. Amen.