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The Joseph Saga

Rev. Allan K. Brooks

Genesis 41

We continue with the Joseph saga. In the past few weeks, we remember how Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, ended up in Egypt, and then he was falsely accused and put into prison. And last week we left Joseph in prison, and God was with him.

As Joseph was in prison, he was put in charge of managing the prisoners. And as time came, the cup holder and the baker of the king, the pharaoh, fell out of favor with the king, and they were put into the same prison that Joseph was in. So Joseph was there in prison with the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker (laughter).

And one morning while he was looking over the prisoners, the cup holder of the king and the baker of the king looked sad. And Joseph said, what's wrong? They said, we both have had dreams, and there is no one here that can interpret them. Joseph says, don't interpretations come from God? Tell me the dreams. So the cup holder and the baker told Joseph their dreams. And he says, that's simple. These dreams represent three days. And he said to the cup holder, in three days you will be restored to your former position. And he turned to the baker and said, in three days, you will be killed. I don't know how they slept the second night (laughter). I am thinking the cup holder slept better than the baker.

But sure enough, in three days the pharaoh of Egypt called a great feast, and he called the cup holder and the baker out of prison. You know, sometimes we think prison is clear at this end (pointing) of the spectrum of society and the palace -- we would call it the White House -- is at this end (pointing). But sometimes the ends are closer than the middle, and you don't necessarily have to pass through all the strata of society. Sometimes you can quickly go from one to the other, and that was the experience of the cup holder and the baker: They went from the palace down to prison, and three days later they went from the prison back up to the palace. The pharaoh sat the cup holder and baker in places of honor at the feast, and sure enough at the end of the feast, the cup holder was restored and handed the cup to the pharaoh, and the baker was killed.

Now, when Joseph interpreted these dreams to the cup holder and to the baker, he said to them, now, when you are restored to your position, remember me. Sometimes I think this is the lowest spot of Joseph because he cries out almost: remember me. And then he speaks the truth, but maybe he gets as close as he ever did to complaining. He said, remember me because I have done nothing to be here. I have done nothing wrong that would place me in this place. And Joseph said, remember me.

And when the cup holder was restored to his position, there tasting the cup for poison before handing it to the pharaoh, handing the cup, shining it and cleaning it, he forget all about Joseph. Does that ever happen to you? You have a friend who says, give me a call. We'll do something. Let's get together, and they forget all about you. We have all been forgotten in life.

So there was Joseph in a foreign land, a slave in prison, and forgotten, and two years passed. Now, Joseph was maybe 17, 19, 20 when he was sold into slavery by his brothers, and now he is near 30 years old, maybe 10 years, maybe 12. So 13 years have passed in his life. Two years after he interpreted the dreams of the cup holder and the baker, the pharaoh had two dreams. And he awoke in the morning, and he was all disturbed, and he says, who can interpret these dreams? He went to the magician, and he went to the council of his court, and no one dared interpret the dreams. You know why? If you got it wrong, you were like the baker, not the cup holder.

So he asked again, and the cup holder finally says, wait a minute, wait a minute. I just remembered now that when we were in prison, there was a Hebrew slave. And both the baker and I had dreams, and we told this Hebrew slave of the dreams, and he interpreted them, and sure enough they came true just like he said.

So pharaoh sent for Joseph from the prison. And Joseph's experience was to go clear from prison to the palace, but the palace eclipsed his time in the prison. It says that to get to the palace, Joseph had to cut his hair and put on clean clothes. We get a picture of Joseph's condition: He had to cut his hair, maybe he had to shave, and he definitely had to get new clothes so that he would be presentable in the palace. You had to look different than you looked in the prison.

So Joseph comes face-to-face with pharaoh. And pharaoh says, I dreamed a dream. Nobody can interpret it, but I have heard that just by hearing a dream, you can interpret it. Joseph answered, not I, but God. God will set pharaoh's mind at ease. Not I, but God.

Those are words all of us should remember; that it's not up to us. We're not here by ourselves. We haven't pulled ourselves up by our own boot straps. We don't have to make it through the day or the week by our own wits, for God is with us. For Joseph, even in the dark, desperate times knew that God was with him.

Our faith has a time of evening out the lows of life and also the highs; that we say, not I, not me, but God. We say that when we think we can't overcome something; we say that when we have a burden that we cannot carry. We say, not me. I can't make it, but God... And we say that when we have the experience of going from prison to the palace, when we are rewarded, when we get accolades, when people think we are so great, we say, not I, but God. Our faith has a way of evening out the highs and the lows of life so the lows are not so low that we can't get out because not me, but God. And the highs aren't so high that we think too much of ourselves, because if we get too high, we're going to fall -- left to our own devices -- but we say, not I, but God.

So pharaoh tells Joseph his two dreams. Pharaoh had a dream of seven fat cows coming up out of the Nile River, and following the seven fat cows were seven skinny cows. And sure enough, the seven skinny cows ate the seven fat cows. Then he went back to sleep and had a dream of seven stalks of grain, seven fat and healthy and full stocks of

grain, and then seven skinny stalks of grain, so dry, nearly dead, dried by the east wind. Again, the seven skinny stalks ate the seven fat ones. And he awoke disturbed.

That's what he told Joseph, and Joseph said, that's simple. That's seven years. God is telling you, God is letting you in on what he is going to do. There will be seven years of bounty. There will be seven years where there's more than we need to eat, and they would be followed by seven years of famine, seven years of draught where there's nothing to eat. And he says, God is letting you in on this. You had the dream twice, so God is determined to do this. If you don't do anything, the seven years of famine will consume the seven years of bounty.

So then Joseph shows a little bit of his chutzpah. He says, what you need to do is find somebody to put in charge (Pastor Allan pointing to himself) (laughter) to make sure that you save grain in the years of bounty. I don't know if you know anybody who is a good manager (Pastor Allan pointing to himself) (laughter). Not to mention any names (Pastor Allen says "Joseph"), to put someone in charge so that through the seven years of bounty grain will be put away, so then when the seven years of famine come, there will be grain in the storehouses.

So pharaoh says, where could we get better than this one? Who has wisdom better than this Hebrew slave? I will put you in charge of all of Egypt. You will be above everything except me. And pharaoh took off his signet ring and gave it to Joseph; that ring being the charge card with unlimited balances of the day. That ring being law, that if wax was put on something and the ring was impressed in it, that was law; that had to be carried out. And he dressed Joseph in the garbs of Egypt, and he said, you are in charge of the whole country.

Now, think about it. Why would Joseph care about this country? Why would he care about the Egyptians? He has been there maybe 10, 12 years. They have basically enslaved him, falsely accused him, put him in prison, and he has had one good day where he got to go to the palace. Why would he care for this land? It is not his land. It's not the land of his birth. His family isn't here. Why would he care? Because Joseph was just as faithful when he reached the peak as he was when he was in the depths.

So he oversaw everything in Egypt. And through the seven years of bounty he made sure that storehouses were built in each town and grain was put away. And finally the seven years of famine came, and the people cried out to pharaoh, we're hungry. What are we going to do? We're not going to make it. And pharaoh said, see Joseph, and do exactly what he says. And Joseph opened the doors of the storehouses and Egypt was the one land out of all the countries that had bread in the midst of the famine.

You see, not only does our faith even out the highs and the lows of life, but our faith gives us a chance to step back and say these circumstances, everything I see around me is not the end. Even though everything may look bleak and empty and down and not what I want, it's not me, it's God. God is still in charge. But our faith doesn't leave us there a step back, our faith calls us to step back into the world to care for the people right

where we are, care for the people that have done us wrong. You understand the man that falsely accused Joseph, his master that had him in slavery, those that were his keepers in the prison; they ate as well as the pharaoh.

We are called to be in ministry right where we are, to pray for our community, our nation, our world, whether it is our land or not our land. How many times in the last week or more has your heart gone out to the people of Haiti? There are probably not many of us that even know anyone in Haiti, but that's not the point. We can picture ourselves in that situation, and we would want someone to come help us. Joseph was faithful; as faithful as when he was in the depths of the dungeon, he was just as faithful when he was at the pinnacle of the palace. May our faith see us through the ups and the downs of life. Amen.