



October 27, 2013 Messages from the Wilderness

Scripture: Genesis 37:23-28

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

MONDAY 10.28.13 Genesis 30:22-24, 33:1-7, 37:1-11 A son of privilege

From his birth, Joseph occupied a special place in his family. He was the family's eleventh child—but the first one born to Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. When Jacob felt afraid that his brother Esau might do something violent when they met, he put all his other children out front, and placed the favored Joseph and his mother safely at the rear. Later, he gave him a highly distinctive garment—perhaps the most famous coat in history.

- Based on your growing up years, is it easier for you to identify with the young Joseph, enjoying his privileged status, or with his brothers, feeling undervalued and ignored? How have you found that God, as a reliable source of what the Bible called “steadfast love,” can be a “fixed point” who helps you grow beyond the wounds the dynamics of family life can leave on all of us?
- Being the “chosen child” made 17-year-old Joseph foolishly, destructively arrogant. Eventually his recital of his dreams of glory upset even his adoring father (verse 10). Have you ever feared that honestly acknowledging your abilities will make you like young Joseph? In what ways have you learned to honestly recognize and offer your talents and gifts, without using them as a tool to make you feel superior to others?

Prayer: Lord God, Joseph grew up amid all kinds of messed up family dynamics. Just as you guided his life, I trust that you are guiding my life above and beyond whatever family issues may cause me problems. Amen.

TUESDAY 10.29.13 Genesis 37:18-28, 39:1-6 Betrayed, yet trusted in Egypt

Joseph's jealous brothers sold him to traders going through the wilderness to Egypt. He became a slave to Potiphar, a powerful royal official, and his reliability and hard work won him

Potiphar's complete trust. Joseph's dramatic story is one of betrayal and providence, of God accomplishing his purposes despite the worst that our broken world can do.

- Put yourself in Joseph's shoes. You have had an easy life. There are stresses between you and your brothers, but despite those, you can still trust your brothers, right? Wrong. Those closest to him betrayed Joseph terribly. Have you ever felt the pain of betrayal? Did that experience tend to weaken or strengthen your faith at the time? In what ways have you grown stronger because of surviving that painful time?
- It would be natural to assume that when Joseph became a slave in Egypt all hope was lost. But as we read of his rise to trust and influence in Potiphar's household, we begin to see God's power at work. The apostle Paul exclaimed: "God's riches, wisdom, and knowledge are so deep! They are as mysterious as his judgments, and they are as hard to track as his paths!" (Romans 11:33) How have you sensed God working in mysterious ways? When has God carried you through a painful or challenging time?

Prayer: Lord God, when to human eyes Joseph's future must have seemed grim, you were already at work through his honest, trustworthy labor. Keep me focused on trusting you one day at a time. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 10.30.13 Genesis 39:7-22 Jailed by a false accusation

Potiphar's wife wanted Joseph to have an affair with her. The text tells us nothing else about her, but it must have been clear to Joseph, a Hebrew slave, that this woman could cause him problems. Nevertheless, he refused to betray his master's trust, and rebuffed her advances. Doing the right thing left her holding the garment he abandoned to escape her, and she used it to back up her lying accusations, and convinced her furious husband to put Joseph in jail.

- Joseph, knowing how much Potiphar trusted him, might have gotten some sensual pleasure and kept his position at the head of the household. But he refused to betray Potiphar's trust, and it cost him—outwardly, at least. How do you handle it when someone else's wrongdoing hurts you unfairly? Have you ever chosen not to do something wrong, even though you could "get away with it"? As you look back, are you glad you preserved your integrity or not? For what reasons?
- It wasn't long before the jail's commander related to Joseph the same way Potiphar had: "The jail's commander put all of the prisoners in the jail under Joseph's supervision" (verse 22). What inner choices do you believe Joseph had to make in order to remain worthy of trust and responsibility even in the face of injustice and disappointment?

Prayer: Lord God, even as Joseph's life seemed to be spiraling downward, you were with him each step of the way. Thank you for being my God, however my life is going right now. Amen.

THURSDAY 10.31.13 Genesis 41:14-44 Honoring God even after unfair imprisonment

Genesis 40 told of Joseph interpreting dreams in prison for two servants of Pharaoh, and asking for help in winning release. When Pharaoh restored the wine steward, he forgot about Joseph, adding two years to Joseph's time in custody. The unjust detention finally ended when the steward recalled that Joseph could interpret troubling dreams. Joseph clearly hadn't

blamed God for all that had gone wrong, and gave God full credit for the explanation. And, astonishingly, Pharaoh abruptly made him second-in-command in all of Egypt!

- When the Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I heard that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it,” Joseph’s answer was quick and clear: “It’s not me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable response” (verse 16). Despite his eagerness to get out of prison, Joseph wouldn’t take the credit Pharaoh offered him when it belonged to God. He’d formed a strong character through his day-by-day choices. What choices are you making each day to build the character and integrity God wants you to have?
- When Pharaoh “put [his signet ring] on Joseph’s hand, dressed him in linen clothes, and put a gold necklace around his neck,” he replaced Joseph’s prison garb! The apostle Peter wrote, “God’s strong hand is on you; he’ll promote you at the right time. Live carefree before God; he is most careful with you” (1 Peter 5:6-7, *The Message*). What helps you to trust that God is “careful” with your life? When things aren’t going as you would wish, how can you be as patient as Joseph was?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, please use Joseph’s story to plant and nurture trust and patience in my heart. Teach me how to live free of care in your eternal presence. Amen.

FRIDAY 11.1.13 Genesis 45:1-15, 50:15-21 Gracious to the brothers who wronged him

An even greater character test awaited Joseph. With no idea that he was the brother they’d sold, Jacob’s sons sought to buy food from Egypt’s powerful “famine czar.” Joseph first put them through some challenging situations (cf. Genesis 42-44), probably to test whether they had grown morally in the years since they sold him. He let go of any ideas of revenge he might have had, and reunited his family with generosity and grace.

- “Don’t be angry with yourselves that you sold me here. Actually, God sent me before you to save lives,” Joseph told his brothers (Genesis 45:5). Recall a time when someone harmed you. How are you letting God redeem that evil, and bend it for good purposes? Do you trust God to be as creative and redemptive in your life as he was in Joseph’s?
- What all might Joseph have done when his brothers came before him? (Don’t forget, in all of Egypt only Pharaoh held more power than he did.) On a spectrum from “most vengeful” to “most generous,” where would you place his response? How would you have acted in his place? How do you imagine Joseph’s forgiving generosity affected his brothers? In what ways did Joseph give us a vivid image of the way God treats us when we need God’s grace?

Prayer: Lord God, St. Francis of Assisi prayed, “Where there is hatred, let me sow love.”

Grow me into the kind of person who treats others in the same reconciling spirit with which you treat me. Amen.

SATURDAY 11.2.13 Matthew 5:10-12 “Happy are you” even when falsely accused

Jesus had personal experience with being falsely accused (see, for example, Luke 11:14-18). All of his “beatitudes” in his Sermon on the Mount, defining what constitutes happiness or “blessedness” in his Kingdom, challenged our assumptions. But Joseph’s life stood as a remarkable demonstration of his final declaration: “Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me.”

- Scholar N. T. Wright highlighted a crucial point to help us understand Jesus' words accurately: "Jesus is not suggesting that these are simply timeless truths about the way the world is, about human behaviour. If he was saying that, he was wrong. Mourners often go uncomfited, the meek don't inherit the earth, those who long for justice frequently take that longing to the grave ... This is an announcement, not a philosophical analysis of the world. It's about something that's starting to happen, not about a general truth of life. It is gospel: good news, not good advice." In what ways have you allowed Jesus' presence in your life to create an inner "climate" in which you find God's joy and peace even in conditions that otherwise would produce anything but those responses?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, grow your peace and trust in my heart so that when (not "if") I face unfair treatment or false accusations, I may respond as you would. Amen.

Family Activity: Joseph had eleven brothers and they were very mean to him. To make him look bad, they even accused him of doing things that he didn't do. Eventually, Joseph forgave them and showed them love and care. As a family, talk together about times people have hurt you or caused you to look bad. How did you feel? How did you respond? What did you think about that person who was hurtful? Did you respond consistently with your faith? How do you wish you had responded differently? Pray and ask God to help you forgive, love and care for the person who hurt you. If possible and with help, talk with the person who was hurtful and let them know you have forgiven them as Jesus has forgiven you.