

Order of Worship

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, October 4, 2020

WELCOME

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 32 UMH p. 766

HYMN 160 *Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart* MARION

SCRIPTURE Genesis 42:1-25

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

HYMN 142 *If You Will Only Let God Guide You* NEUMARK

SCRIPTURE Genesis 43:1-2,14-23, 26-34

MESSAGE

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 355 *Depth of Mercy* CANTERBURY

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Are You Willing to Face Your Past? Genesis 42 & 43

Twenty years is a long time. Think about all that has happened in the past 20 years of your life – degrees earned, jobs held, skills developed, places lived, children (and grandchildren) born, and life lessons learned. As we continue to look at the life of Joseph, it has been 20 years from the time he was thrown into a pit and sold as a slave by his brothers. In this sermon series it has only been five

weeks for us, but 20 years have gone by for Joseph, his brothers, and their father Jacob. For Jacob, the grief over being told Joseph was killed by a wild animal is still raw. For the brothers, they probably assumed Joseph was long dead, since slaves had a short lifespan. The skeleton remained in their closet, but God has a way of working everything together to help them – and us – face the sins of our past and find forgiveness.

Last week in chapter 41 we learned how Pharaoh's dreams resulted in Joseph being brought out of prison to not only interpret them, but then put as second-in-command to oversee a strategic plan of saving extra crops during seven years of abundance in order to have enough for seven years of famine. They were now two years into the famine, which has spread far beyond Egypt's borders into Canaan where Joseph's brothers and father lived. Jacob sent his sons to buy grain in Egypt, but you can imagine that was not what they wanted to do. Who wants to humbly ask for food that will keep you from starving? Who wants to face the place where you sent your brother to live and die as a slave? They will soon be learning a lot more about how to face their past, and so will we.

Joseph instantly recognizes them when they arrive, but he doesn't let them know. Joseph is speaking the Egyptian language and wearing Egyptian clothes so he is completely incognito to them. The first thing they do is bow before him, which fulfills the dream Joseph had 20 years before that they heard through envious ears and retaliated by making Joseph a slave who would bow to others. Verse 7 states, *When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said.* Perhaps it felt good for Joseph to get a tiny bit of revenge toward his brothers. Let them feel like unwelcome outsiders. Let them bow in submission. Let them cower in desperation.

But is that truly what Joseph is doing? Is that what God does? Not being upfront with his brothers right away is deceitful, isn't it? Let's look at it from another angle. I think Joseph was interested in helping more than their physical need for food. Though he had been forsaken by his brothers and had adapted to the Egyptian language and life, he was still a Hebrew at heart. He would always be a part of his family, so if he just gave them the grain and sent them away, there could be no reconciliation. In order for there to be reconciliation,

there has to be a change of heart by his brothers. Joseph needed to know if his brothers still hated him or if they were ready to repent. Ray Pritchard says, “Joseph takes the hard road of concealing his true identity so that his brothers could reveal their own hearts to him.”

I believe that Joseph was following God’s lead on testing his brothers to help them see the condition and needs of their hearts. First, they were tested by lost prosperity and famine. Second, by this harsh treatment by Joseph. We later read how the tests keep coming when they had to spend three days in prison, then keeping Simeon in prison while the rest of the brothers returned with food to their father. After they ran out of grain from their first trip, they had to oblige the demand to bring Benjamin back to Egypt as well as face the worrisome issue of finding the money they thought they had used to pay for the grain back in their sacks. Would they be charged with theft and all end up suffering and dying in an Egyptian prison?

When it comes to facing our past, the first thing we must do is resist the urge to cover it up with lies or avoiding the truth. Joseph’s brothers realized this in Gen. 42:21, *They said to one another, “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. That is why this anguish has come upon us.”* This signals the first key step in facing the past. It is confessing our sin. It is owning up to both what we have done (hurting others) and what we have left undone (failing to listen to others’ cries). It is recognizing and admitting to sins of commission (causing harm to others) and sins of omission (neglecting to help others). My upbringing in a Lutheran church evokes deep memories and meaning of our weekly liturgical confession: “We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by things we have done, and by things we have left undone.”

The next step in facing our past is to recognize God at work in our lives, both past and present. For Joseph’s brothers, this happens on their way back home when they discover the silver coins that had been intended as payment for the grain. Joseph secretly had the silver put back into their sacks to give the appearance that they had stolen the grain. *At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, “What is this that God has done to us?”* (Genesis 42:28). If you were to look back over the previous 5 chapters and 20 years of time, this is the first time the brothers ever mention God. With all of the evil and deceit they did in the past, they had pushed any thought

or concern for God and God's ways out of their minds. They had attempted to repress both their sin and God's truth and justice. Now they are recognizing that God's light is revealing their darkness. Though it hurts, it is like a wound that must be cleaned before it can begin to heal. This is true in our lives too.

The antiseptic is poured on again when they run out of grain again. To be able to eat and live, they were told they must bring their youngest brother Benjamin back to Egypt with them. Jacob does not want to let Benjamin out of his sight, especially since he already lost two other sons - he thinks Joseph is dead and Simeon is in jail in Egypt. *"I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!"* (Genesis 42:36)

When all the brothers, including Benjamin, arrive back in Egypt to buy more grain, "Incognito Joe" asks probing questions that likely leave his brothers bewildered. "Is your father alive and well?" "Is this your youngest brother? God be gracious to you, my son!". Joseph is then overcome with emotion and has to leave the room. *"With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, "Serve the meal".* (Gen. 43:30-31)

As the meal began, the brothers noticed something peculiar. They were seated around the table in the exact order of their birth. How did this happen? How could anyone in Egypt know this? Adding to the mystery is that when the food is served, Benjamin received five times as much as his brothers. All of them receive plenty of food, but Benjamin is given special favor.

This is yet another test. Will the same brothers who were envious of Joseph envy Benjamin now? Or have they learned that in God's abundance some people may appear to be more favored than others, but that God loves everyone equally? Is the deadly cycle of envy broken yet?

We all have shadows we suppress, darkness we deny, and ghosts in our closet. Will we invite God's light to shine and heal us? Will we repent and recognize God at work even when the truth hurts? Will we pray and trust in God's timing and amazing ways to work in people who have hurt us? Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.