

Order of Worship

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 13, 2020

WELCOME

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 1 UMH p. 738

HYMN 139 *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* LOBE DEN HERREN

SCRIPTURE Genesis 39:1-6

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.

SCRIPTURE Genesis 39:6-18

HYMN 395 *Take Time to Be Holy* HOLINESS

SCRIPTURE Genesis 39:19-23

MESSAGE *Do You Know Who You Are?*

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 398 *Jesus Calls Us* GALILEE

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Prayer Corner

- The Hornby and Strong families as we honor Claire's life
- Andy White as he heals from surgery

Do You Know Who You Are? – Gen. 39 – Pastor Rebecca

As we explore the big question, “Do you know who you are?”, we come to the fundamental issue of identity. When I was in the middle school phase of being insecure about what other people thought about me, I remember a friend saying, “Becky, when anybody thinks of you, they picture you holding a chocolate chip cookie in one hand and an oboe in the other hand.” That was a fairly accurate summary of my life – I loved baking and eating cookies and I was praised for playing my oboe in tune most of the time. I identified as a cookie-loving oboist, but when I moved to college, my sinuses didn’t take kindly to long hours of blowing through a tiny reed and my dorm lacked a kitchen for baking. Who was I with these marks of my identity now gone?

Last week in Genesis 37 we were introduced to Joseph, who seemed like the cocky son of Jacob who infuriated his brothers and exasperated his father with his dreams that appeared to be self-aggrandizing. His brothers’ hatred, resentment, and jealousy led to Joseph being imprisoned in a pit and sold as a slave. Chapter 38 switches the focus off of Joseph and exposes his brother Judah and his very dysfunctional family. Now in chapter 39, our focus is back on Joseph and God’s presence with him.

There is a fine line between being cocky and confident, but they are attitudes that are clearly worlds apart. It’s hard to pinpoint when and how Joseph made the shift from a brash 17 year-old to a responsible young adult, but we see clear signs of it in this chapter. One mark of maturity is making the transition from being concerned what other people think about us to thinking more about how we can show concern and care for other people. It often takes deeply humbling experiences to move us and our sense of who we are to who we really are as God made us.

Joseph’s identity was first wrapped up in being the favorite son of Jacob and destined to rule. With the fancy robe ripped off and dipped in blood, his sense of identity likely felt torn from him. Brought to Egypt and sold as a slave to a high-ranking official named Potiphar, his high status as the favorite son of a very wealthy man took a drastic downward turn. Despite the dire circumstances, we are told ***The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw***

that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands.” (Gen. 39:2-3)

There are two questionably related things that bear noting. There is the double-reminder that “the Lord was with Joseph”, which we too often overlook as a ho-hum statement that is likely true for everyone everywhere all the time. Then our ears perk up when we read the double statements about how Joseph became successful and prosperous. Is there a connection between God’s presence and our prosperity? Does this imply that when life falls apart that God has left our side or never existed in the first place? We tend to focus on words like “success” and “prosper” and get seduced by the lure of wealth and power.

Unfortunately, we can all see – and hopefully even admit to it in ourselves – how “success” is what often leads to a pride which walks away from trusting in God for our sense of identity and self-worth. God’s grace will confront our simplistic definition of success and prosperity. It is actually a blessing when the identity that others give us or we design for ourselves to be “successful” is stripped away. As the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said, “Now, with God’s help, I shall become myself”. Our true identity is revealed when we learn that true prosperity and success is having and using our whole lives to love God and love people. It is trusting God completely with the design and dream for your life even when it may feel like you’re far from prosperous or successful.

A twin threat to how we identify ourselves is dealing with how other people see us. Genesis 39:6b-8a says, *Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. And after a time his master’s wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, ‘Lie with me’ But he refused....* Potiphar’s wife was undoubtedly attracted to him not only physically, but also to the presence and power of God in Joseph that she clearly didn’t understand. She wanted to use Joseph, which he wisely saw as a trap to enslave him in another way.

We must be alert to the seductions of money, sex, and power that are not ultimately signs of true success, but signal ways that our identity and purpose can be hijacked and enslaved. British playwright Oscar Wilde once quipped, “I can resist anything except temptation.” What exactly is temptation? Here is a working definition: *“Temptation is the inner urge to do wrong that hits us in the place of our own personal weakness.”* The urge to make bad

choices comes from the weaknesses in our identity. It can't be blamed on a persistent or irritating person, an unhealthy relationship, or "the devil made me do it". Those might be factors in the temptation equation, but we must take responsibility to deal and seek healing for the broken or distorted parts of who we are.

Thankfully, that responsibility is found in the simple truth of seeking the power of the Lord's presence to heal and transform us. The Holy Spirit begins to remind us that we are human beings, not human doings. We start to shed our simplistic self-image so that God can show us who we really are and Whose we are. Our souls are transformed to understand the truth of Galatians 2:20: *"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

When we were baptized and later confirmed, promises were made to resist evil and injustice in whatever forms they present themselves. The waters of baptism symbolically drowned our identities that need to be successful and powerful and attractive, and we drowned and buried our self-serving desires. God then raises us out of that water and fills us with the power to resist the temptation to be anything less than the full image of Christ alive in us.

It is important to note that even when Joseph faithfully leaned on God's power to flee this temptation, he found himself yet again in a prison. I'm guessing all of us can think of times where we or someone else has done the right thing but wound up getting kicked in the teeth. Do not despair, because even then the chapter concludes with, *"But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer...The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper."*
– Genesis 39:21,23

God is with you too. Perhaps we need to redefine "success" and "prosperity" to focus less on money and power and more on faithfulness and integrity. Perhaps we need to be reminded of and reaffirm our baptismal vows. Because at the end of the day, your identity must boil down to this reality spoken over you as you were baptized and confirmed: "The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ."