

Order of Worship

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 6, 2020

WELCOME

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 139: 13-18 UMH p. 855

HYMN 61 *Come, Thou Almighty King* ITALIAN HYMN

SCRIPTURE Genesis 37:2-11

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 37:17-24

HYMN 428 *For the Healing of the Nations* CWM RHONDDA

SCRIPTURE Genesis 37:25-36

MESSAGE *Do You Know Why You Were Born?*

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 569 *We've a Story to Tell to the Nations* MESSAGE

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Prayer Corner

- Jona Freeman, Jen Marzu's sister-in-law, is experiencing multiple organ failure.
- Andy White's surgery and recovery
- Claire and the Hornby family

Do You Know Why You Were Born? – Gen. 37 – Pastor Rebecca

Mark Twain said, “The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” Having a sense of purpose in life – and having the assurance that it is the right purpose – is something that many of us struggle with. It is especially hard when our hopes and dreams fade or fall apart. We start to question ourselves and our faith.

Today begins a nine-week series that follows the dreams and purpose of God working in and through the life of Joseph, found in Genesis 37-50. It begins when he is 17 years old, surrounded by 10 older half-brothers who looked down on him. His father, Jacob (also called “Israel”), saw something special in Joseph. It helps to frame the story of Joseph’s family dynamics as being a turbulent triangle with Joseph, his brothers, and his father at each of the 3 points. Joseph’s name means “add”, and his life is seen as an added and extra-special gift to his father, but as an added threat and intrusion by his brothers. This triangular relationship is not unique to Joseph’s family. Each of us has likely experienced or seen a triangle in which one person is “loved” too much (Joseph), one “loves” too much (Jacob), and one feels “loved” too little (the brothers). And we wonder why the word describing the very essence of God – love – gets distorted.

If we agree with Augustine’s definition of sin being “distorted love”, then it’s easy to see how this dysfunctional triangle moves from tension, filled with hatred and jealousy of the brothers toward Joseph, to violence, as they nearly murder him but instead throw him in a pit as a prisoner and sell him as a slave, and then it ends in grief as the father Jacob mourns both his favored son and his dreams.

It’s important to understand that Joseph’s dreams are not night-time phenomena. They are not a day dreamer’s hopes. They are a vision from God that power is shifting and justice is coming. These dreams are akin to Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, in which he shares a vision of equality. His final sentence proclaims, “When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when *all* of God’s children, black men and

white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: *Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!*”

Sadly, that dream of freedom and justice articulated so powerfully 57 years ago has not yet become a reality for all people. It’s the sad and frustrating reality that echoes Joseph’s life and dreams. There will be many enemies of the dream – Joseph’s brothers as we see here, Potiphar and his wife, fellow prisoners, and famine as we’ll see in the coming weeks. Despite whatever resistance comes, the dreams and visions of our truly loving and just God will be fulfilled.

Joseph’s brothers want to keep the status quo of their superiority. We don’t have to look far to see “Joseph’s brothers” in our world, and if we’re honest, in our own hearts. We are happy with the way things are and feel threatened if it appears that we have to give up some of our status or comfort to ensure racial, economic, and social justice for all of God’s children. We’re also like Jacob, who just wants to have peace in the family. He doesn’t resist the dream like the brothers do, but he wants to subdue the dream with a false sense of peace. He chides Joseph’s dreams in v. 10: *“But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, “What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?”*

It will take Joseph’s brothers and father many decades before God redeems dark family secret that eventually opens their eyes to see the vision and provision that God foretold in dreams through Joseph all along. That is an essential element to how we must understand our own purpose in life. God’s dream and purpose for our life is just that – God’s, and ultimately not our own. If we want to know our purpose in life, we must let go of our personal preferences and self-protection. We must bow before God and others with honor and humility. We must say “Not my will but Thine be done” as we surrender to God’s grace to transform our desires from self-fulfillment to fulfillers of God’s dreams.

In 1647-49 the Westminster Short Catechism was written by Scottish Presbyterians and has been memorized by thousands of people since

then. The most memorable part for me is the answer to the first of 107 confirmation questions, “What is the chief end of man?” (in other words, “What is the purpose of people?”) The answer? “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” This is why we begin worship with a Psalm and hymn of praise describing God’s holiness, grace, and love. To glorify God means to know God’s essence, to worship with Spirit and truth, and to live lives reflecting God’s nature. John Wesley, who undoubtedly knew the Westminster Catechism, proclaimed this a century after it was written: *Your life is continued to you upon earth, for no other purpose than this, that you may know, love, and serve God on earth, and enjoy him to all eternity.* It is helpful to summarize “know, love, and serve” as “glorify”. But that is not all – the idea of enjoying God for eternity – both here and now and forever – is central to our purpose. It’s a reminder that God is not trying to steal our fun or freedom but fills our souls with true joy.

We must not give in to the lie that says our joy can be taken by any other person. True joy is not based in our sense of financial security, pain-free health, problem-free relationships, and entertainment. When we try to “protect” those things in our lives, we become less like Joseph and more like his brothers and even his father Jacob. We then lose our purpose and our ability to both glorify and enjoy God.

I want to give you something to think about this week. Using the general idea of glorifying (or knowing, loving, and serving) God and enjoying God forever, how would you put that in your own words? To make it more specific to you, what dreams has God given you that are bigger than you can fulfill? How can a gift that the Spirit has given to you be used to fulfill that dream? How is God calling you to take the next step in living your purpose to glorify and enjoy God?

It is not easy hearing and sharing God’s dream. When God turns things right-side up, people who think they prefer living upside-down get upset. You might get thrown into a pit and sold as a slave like Joseph. You might get thrown in jail and assassinated like Martin Luther King, Jr. You might be thinking God’s dream is dead, like Jacob. But God’s dream and purpose for all of us will ultimately prevail as we learn to glorify and enjoy God even in dark times.