

Lenten Devotional March 11, 2018

Scripture

Genesis 48:8-22

⁸When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" ⁹Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." ¹⁰Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them. ¹¹Israel said to Joseph, "I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also." ¹²Then Joseph removed them from his father's knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. ¹³Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them near him. ¹⁴But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. ¹⁵He blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, ¹⁶the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth." ¹⁷When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." ¹⁹But his father refused, and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." ²⁰So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will invoke blessings, saying, 'God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. ²¹Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors. ²²I now give to you one portion more than to your brothers, the portion that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."

Devotional

The Rev. Richard Wingfield '02/'13, Pastor, Unity Baptist Church, Braddock, Pa. / Theological Reflections on Ministry Course Discussion Leader

Has God ever reversed your plans? You had good intentions. You did your homework. You set things in their proper order. Then when the time came to proceed, God had something different in mind and upset your proverbial apple cart. So it happens to Joseph in today's Scripture reading from Genesis. He brings his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to his father, Israel, to receive the patriarchal blessing. Joseph positions them so that Manasseh is at Israel's favored right hand and Ephraim, the younger son, is at Israel's left hand. Israel, however, crisscrosses his hands to place his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. Joseph tries to rectify the issue. But Israel knows exactly what he's doing; for though his physical sight has diminished, Israel still possesses keen spiritual insight. Though the descendants of both of Joseph's sons would be a great people, Israel sees something in Ephraim that would surpass Manasseh.

As humans, we tend to operate according to cultural norms. We are often influenced by social convention or personal bias because we're accustomed to functioning in this way. As such, we miss the big picture. The prophet reminds us that God's thoughts are distinct from ours. We must be open to and in tune with God's desires, not our own. Are you influenced by social convention or personal bias in your choices? Do you make choices based on social convention or human preferences? Or, alternatively, are you in tune with God so that you can choose based on divine directives? Jesus reminds us from Gethsemane, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."

Prayer

God of glory, help us to be open to your will so that we may see things as you see them. Open our hearts that we may adjust to your desires. Open our spirits that we may accept your will. Amen.