

Lent Devotional March 9, 2020

Scripture

Genesis 41:46-57

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. 47 During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. 48 He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. 49 So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure. 50 Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. 51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” 52 The second he named Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.” 53 The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.” 56 And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57 Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

Devotional

The Rev. Michael Stanton '06, Mission (2017)

As I began writing this meditation, I was struggling with depression, overwhelmed by vocational challenges, and dogged by a sense of dread that I was failing. It was in that mental state that I found the depiction of Joseph’s prosperity and success irritating—until Mannaseh and Ephraim were birthed into the story. The names of Joseph’s sons serve as reminders of the hardships and misfortunes Joseph had endured for the better part of his 30 years of life: being forsaken by his brothers and sold into slavery, falsely accused of a crime and imprisoned—unmerited hardships resulting from the jealousy and spite of others and instigated, ironically enough, by Joseph’s God-given gifts and obedience.

My hardships pale in comparison. Yet in Joseph we see no indication of a darkening disposition, no hint of resentment, no feelings of failure. His demeanor begs the question, “What got him through?” As Joseph realized the horrific reality of his brothers’ intentions, did he have hope? As he was being escorted down the dark corridors leading to his prison cell, did he have hope? What did that hope look like? What form did hope take to enable him to hold onto it and stave off depression, resentment, and defeat?

In the midst of these questions a pattern emerges: At the onset of each of Joseph’s hardships, the reality of God’s presence is acknowledged. As he was pulled from the pit by his new owners and carried into an unknown future, “the Lord was with Joseph” (39:2). As his eyes were still adjusting to the darkness of his prison cell, “the Lord was with Joseph” (39:21). During the development of each hardship, the power of God’s presence is acknowledged. As the baker, the butler, and the pharaoh all looked to Joseph to make sense of their dreams, Joseph asks, “do not interpretations belong to God?” (40:8) and declares, “it is not I,” (41:16). And at the conclusion of each hardship, the faithfulness of God’s presence is acknowledged. In fact, at the pinnacle of Joseph’s prosperity and the birth of his two sons, Joseph gives them *Hebrew* names whose meanings declare the faithfulness of God!

In the pit, in the prison, and in prosperity, Joseph's hope is rooted not in the circumstances, not in himself, but in the reality of God's powerful and faithful presence.

Prayer

Merciful Lord, in our pits, our prisons, and our prosperity, draw us not to ourselves but, instead, to the reality, power, and faithfulness of your presence with us—in, as, and through your Son, Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Deliver us from the emptiness of self-reliance and use us to share your presence with and to serve “all the world.” We make these requests for your glory and in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.