

Sermon: Truth Seekers

Scripture: Genesis 45:1-15, Matthew 15:10-20

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Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, Illinois

Joseph is known to be a Christ-like figure in the Old Testament by many scholars. As his story is told in the closing chapters of Genesis, today we are looking at the climax of Joseph's story: the unveiling of who he is to his brothers. Listen to the God's Word from first 15 verses of Genesis chapter 45.

¹Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ²And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God; God has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹I will provide for you there: since there are five more years of famine to come — so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' ¹²And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. ¹³You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Today's gospel reading comes from Matthew 15:10-20. After witnessing Jesus feeding the five thousand with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish out of compassion, and unbeknownst to them, after the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, Pharisees and scribes challenges Jesus by asking why his disciples break tradition by not washing their hands before they eat. Hear now the Word of the Lord as Jesus response with a parable.

¹⁰Then Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: ¹¹it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." ¹²Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" ¹³He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." ¹⁵But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." ¹⁶Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

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Text: So it was not you who sent me here, but God; God has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Genesis 45:8

Would you pray with me? Dear Compassionate Lord, we thank you for being with us throughout this week, covering us with your grace and postponing the rainy weather to do your work throughout the week. Now as we gather around your Word, may your love and truth be lifted up and illuminated in our hearts. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Westminster believes we are in the world for ministry. Many of you have participated to make this statement true this week, as we put on our Westminster T-shirts and various tools – power tools, manual tools, power washers, paint brushes, and various kitchen tools to feed the hungry workers – made a difference to our neighborhood this past week. Thanks to the humidity, we gave an additional sweat equity to our investment in our neighborhood. Also thank you for the thoughts and prayers for those who could not attend physically but were with us spiritually. Your prayers made it possible for us to work without interruptions as the weather forecast changed dramatically to make this week go so smoothly.

This week, in our missional efforts, we became a source of blessing for many households around our church, not simply financially but also spiritually and emotionally to remind our neighbors that we are here, and that we care for them. The dream and the decision of this congregation made over 20 years ago to remain at the corner of W. Edwards and S. Walnut to be the steadfast neighbor took another bold step forward, adding to all the wonderful ministries which are already taking place.

To be where we are, I am sure Westminster had its hardships in its past like Joseph to be where we are today. Joseph had his share of trials and tribulations; being thrown into a dry well and then sold as a slave by his step-brothers, falsely imprisoned for crime he did not commit, and being forgotten and invisible when the credit was due his way. I wonder what went through Joseph's mind and his heart when these moments took place. The Bible does not share what he felt but, in all situations, good or bad, the Bible tells us that God was with him and so did the blessing of the Lord. He did not give up, he did not relent, he did not let go of the hope and faith in the Lord as he continued his life's journey. Because of this personal trait, to me, Joseph is the ultimate truth seeker. Because of that, not only was he blessed, but all the people who were with him. Potiphar was blessed and prosperous while Joseph was with him; the cupbearer was blessed, the pharaoh, and all of Egypt were blessed in a similar way because of Joseph's presence in their lives. Even his stepbrothers who betrayed him and sold him as a slave were forgiven and blessed by being with Joseph. But that is another sermon for a different day.

Likewise, I am sure that many of us, if not all of us, had a moments in our lives that challenged our core beliefs yet through God's grace we were able to hold on to our faith to make it through. Today's passage is challenging us to become a truth seeker, just like Joseph. A renown Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, says this about Joseph.

*Joseph's recognition of God's plan for Israel does not lead to abdicating trust. It leads to a vocation. There is a perfect correlation between God's will for life and Joseph's work of providing... Joseph does not 'leave it all in God's hands.' But he also does not believe that 'God has no hands but ours.' He accepts his vocation."*¹

The Bible clearly tells us God's plan is for all of us: to reconcile us in order that we may have relationship and eternity with God. We recognize that our salvation comes from the Lord as a gift through Jesus Christ. We need to be like Joseph and be a truth seeker who accepts our own vocation, a calling.

Hence our work of doing mission is not complete and will never be completed until we are face to face with our maker. Our calling is to be a source of blessing wherever we are through every word and every deed that comes sincerely from our hearts. As today's Matthew passage reminds us, it is these two things: our words and our hearts make who we are as Christians who have answered God's call. There is no better person than Jesus to follow the matters of the heart and to imitate. Philippians 2 teaches us how to be like Christ.

⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was^[a] in Christ Jesus,

*⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God*

as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

So what would be an easy way to remember to be like Joseph and Jesus? Be like a bamboo tree. Have faith that nothing – no trials and tribulations, no storms of life – can uproot you. We will bend at the face of adversity but never bend through God's grace and mercy. We will

¹ Genesis, pg. 377

be hollow and empty on the inside for God to use us as vessels. We will be at our best when we empty ourselves to others around us when we share God's love that comes down like a rain.

One positive difference between bamboo trees and Joseph/Jesus (the true seekers) is that they grow the best and are at their best when they are in a community of other bamboo trees to lean on one another, grow with, and work together to build a forest that is as formidable as any other trees around the world.

Therefore, let us be a living sacrifice, who are dedicated and consecrated to do our Savior's will. By continuing to seek the truth of our lives being in God's hands, let us continue to be a blessing to others around us, and many more years to come at the corner of W. Edwards and S. Walnut. Amen.