

Sermon Text for July 17, 2016

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Acts 10:9-16, Genesis 40

“Looking Ahead”

It has been an incredibly busy week here at First Presbyterian Church and so much of what we are doing has to do with looking toward the future. As we seek out a new preschool teacher since we are expanding our preschool program and looking for a part time director of youth and young adult ministries, as we prepare to begin our children’s church for both services and crank back up Clubhouse, it reminds me that this church is pretty good at looking ahead. As we prepared for months for VBS which begins this evening and the ministry that we have with our children, we often say, they are our future. We have a past that reflects that approach to our ministry. As a church that was founded in 1832, you know 184 years ago things were a bit different back then. This church is older than the theory of evolution itself. Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* was published when this church was a young 27 years old. This church lived through the civil war. This congregation was a wizened 53 years old when Benz created the first auto in 1885.

So often we think that it is easy to go forward and we end up disregarding the past. But it is absolutely crucial to look back in order to look ahead. Joseph, we have seen, is a dreamer. Today we find him interpreting dreams for two of his cell mates. But we find in this account that Joseph has his sights on the future and provides a correct interpretation of what the future, the dreams hold, but he ends up being forgotten, a relic of the past whose contribution was overlooked because someone had their eyes so set on the future.

We will see today that we always need to have our eyes set on the future, but never, ever forget those who brought us to where we are, especially the one who brought us to where we are, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let’s see how Joseph the dreamer with his eyes on the future is able to not forget his past, and rather use it to his advantage.

For some of you who are not following social media or out of touch with what is happening in our society and culture today, you might want to pay special attention to what I say next. First, what happened in Dallas, and what happened in Niece, what is happening in Turkey, all of it is something that this nation, this world has seen before and we are in so many ways repeating a past because of lessons we have not learned, or

because of sins of some that ultimately tragically affect the lives of many. In order to look toward the future, we have to be aware of the past and know that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Only when Jesus comes back and claims us as his children, which will happen, will things actually be different in the world.

Let me tell you what is different today. (images of pokemon) Pokemon Go sounds like a silly game that has no consequential determinations for any of us. When we grew up do you remember how many channels we had? (image of how many channels) The choices for TV are now endless. Not to say anything of the other choices in this consumer society. So what would looking forward, into the future look like? I think this is something where we are ahead of the curve. Let me show you what happens when we announced that we are welcoming of people who play Pokemon Go. (Image of kids) And one of the gamers left this: (image of potato chips). When I get to church there are a few cars in the parking lot of young adults playing the game before they head off to work.

Looking into the future we can make a decision to not want to have anything to do with it, sneer at it, call it a passing fad that has nothing to do with church, or, we can seize the opportunity that is presented before us and look into the future that maybe, just maybe, one of these kids, one of these young adults, when they need someone to walk alongside of them, just might say, there was a church that didn't laugh at me, but actually embraced me. I don't know anything about them, but I need their help. I think we were ahead of the curve this past week and it served us well.

Let's look at the Scripture and remember where we are. Joseph the dreamer is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and he is bought in Egypt by the captain of Pharaoh's guards whose wife is a cross between Mrs. Robinson and Glenn Close in Fatal Attraction. Joseph finds himself in the dungeon, the same word which is used when he finds himself in the pit by his brothers hands, and there he is given charge over all the prisoners. It seems that everything Josephs does works out for him. He still has that Midas touch because God blesses Joseph.

The stage is set when two of the newest prisoners each have a different dream. Now for Joseph dreams are not events of the past being relived but rather future possibilities that God gives to each of us. I love this line in chapter 40. Joseph tells the prisoners, "Don't you know that interpretation belongs to God, come on you'll never

figure it out, only God will. So, please tell me what it is.” Josephs hasn’t lost his humility after the run-in with his brothers. But they do tell Joseph the dreams.

Joseph gives good news to the first person. But then he says something interesting. His next words are , But remember me once you get the good news. Remember who it was that allowed you to make it where you will be. The second person sees a favorable interpretation and asks for his interpretation. He gets bad news and Joseph of course doesn’t ask him to remember him.

Joseph asks the question, or better yet makes the request, remember me. What a poignant, touching request. Eric and I were in 4th grade together. 4th grade is a tough grade to be in. One day you are in the in-crowd, the next day you’re out. Eric always seemed to be in the out-crowd. The most painful example of that was when it came time to choose sides for kickball. Eric was always the last one to be picked, and sometimes if there were odd players he wasn’t allowed to play at all.

The memory of Eric haunts me sometimes as I see people who throughout their lives are crying out: remember me. Remember Jesus on the cross and the thief says what to Jesus? Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom. There is nothing so sad as to be forgotten. When we were in Florida we started a church called Damascus church and it would be in the evening and I would go to the hospital or go on visits after the morning church and Rachel would love to come with me to Damascus. The first couple of times I was in such a rush and trying to get from one thing to the next that I actually forgot her after I had told her I would stop and pick her up. I got home from the church service, she would be fast asleep on the couch and my heart would break because I knew that she had tried to stay up to see me when I got home.

Nobody wants to be forgotten. Especially those who have done so much for a cause, or for a church and they feel that their efforts, their opinions, their resources, their time is forgotten. One of the greatest and gravest dangers that we face as a church that is committed to looking toward the future is to do what the cupbearer of pharaoh did and that is forget the people that got us to where we are today.

This church is filled with people who do not want to be forgotten. I think of those husbands who spend hours away from their wives and children, who feel forgotten. I think of those with gifts and talents in this church who want to contribute but haven’t tapped in yet to our programs because they don’t know how to and don’t want to be

forgotten. There is probably no worse feeling in the world than being forgotten. You know that feeling don't you.

I think it was the feeling that Christ felt when he was hanging on the cross saying My God my God why have you forsaken me. He could have said just as easily, my God my God why have you forgotten me. Today we find ourselves with two competing demands. We find ourselves encouraged and pushed to look forward because of the growth and excitement that we feel in the church. On the other hand, we find ourselves in a situation where we need to remember the Joseph's of our community who interpreted the early dreams of this church and put them into action long before we were ever around.

This church exists today not because of any one man or woman, or even because of any one group of men or women, but because of the grace of God. We can say for a fact that this church is not our church, it does not belong to any of us, but rather it belongs to the Almighty God who gives us a dream to pursue and who remembers us as His people. Joseph may have been feeling that not only did the cupbearer forget him but God did as well.

We can look at our history as a church and know that God has not forgotten us. Can you say the same thing about your own life? Or do you feel a little like Joseph in that cell unable to look forward because everyone in your life has forgotten you, gone on in their life and left you behind. Even God himself you think has forgotten you. I can assure you that God will never leave you or forsake you, God will never forget you ever. You can use Joseph as your example of someone who had a rougher life than you will ever imagine, and yet God continued to guide him and bless him in everything that he did because he refused to look back and be stuck in the sorrow of his past. He was able to look forward and move forward.

This is what God calls us to do in this Scripture and that is to look always at the future, but don't ever forget the past. Amen.