

Sermon Text for August 7, 2016

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Mark 2:18-20, Genesis 41:46-49,53-57

“Preparing in times of plenty”

How many of you have been watching the Olympics since the events started yesterday? How about that 14 year old girl who won her heat and is on the refugee team. She fled her home country of Syria and her boat was taking in water and she said: I thought it would be funny if I died drowning because I’m such a good swimmer. She jumped out of the boat and swam pulling the boat for 3 hours until it reached land. There are so many inspirational stories, but that one has to be the best one that I have ever heard. Her attitude about the ordeal and about her current reality is handled as a teenager, bubbly and full of life.

I’ve noticed that over these past few weeks as we have been focusing upon Joseph we have been stressing some fairly common themes such as God being faithful in times of crisis, when we are confronted with times of want we are to go forward. We have heard a lot of crisis preaching and yet I recognize that a vast majority of us do not feel that our lives are on the edge and that we are sinking deeper into a pit from which only God can salvage us. I’m an optimistic person and the most blissful person I know, don’t bring up that saying that pairs ignorance and bliss. But I love the world in which I live and the people with whom I interact, all of them. So it is not in my nature to crisis preach constantly and consistently. But Joseph has been in crisis pretty much ever since we have been hearing about him.

Most of us live our daily lives one day at a time, things go fairly well and we consider our lives to be fairly normal routine lives. Sure things come up but we deal with them when we have to and we are able to, for the most part, put things in perspective. We don’t find ourselves swimming for our lives at 14 with a boatload of people relying upon us, or in jail falsely accused before we are 30 wondering when we are going to face the chopping block.

Most of us need to hear a message of how do we live our lives day by day in the workplace, at home, as we face the normal joys and disappointments of life. I could preach every Sunday on the need for Jesus in order to obtain eternal life. That is true and it is what makes me a preacher, I believe it. Without Jesus, nothing we say or do in this

church matters. That is the foundation of who we are and what we do. But the assumption that I make most Sundays, and today included, is that we know who Jesus is. So, today we are going to see how Joseph as he breaks out into a life that is somewhat mainstream, how he lives his life. It is a life of preparation, of vigilance, of goals and strivings that he accomplishes because he is disciplined to do so.

Today I'm going to encourage you to live your life as one of celebration, and preparation. You may not be fighting out of a pit or feel forgotten, but rather you need to hear a word of encouragement, feel a nudge to direct and guide you on your way. Today in Genesis we get that nudge as we are told to store up our spiritual strengths, and in a disciplined way commit to making goals of reading Scripture and praying.

Karl Barth once said that every Christian should have a time during the day when they are to read Scripture faithfully and without distraction. We've heard that before, but he added that with the Holy Scripture we should have a newspaper in the other hand to make sure that we are not so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good. I'm a news junkie, I've told you that before. I can tell you more about the political race that is going on in this country than most people, both sides. I can tell you about what is happening in the world in the economies of nations and the violence that we are facing. I can tell you which countries have done well in preparing for their future, like it seems we have done here in the United States as our economy starts to tick upward. Or those countries who have done poorly, as Russia struggles because it is so heavily dependent upon oil that they are in a crisis that they never imagined they would be in 8 years ago.

It sounds like what our main character, Joseph, had warned Pharaoh about. Young Joseph at 30 was entrusted by Pharaoh in the years of plenty to store the food and keep track of that which was put aside. Now these 7 years of plenty were so plentiful that at a certain point they had gathered and stored so much they could not count it all. Joseph was very good in what he did.

You get the idea that in these years of plenty the storing and keeping of food was so down to a science that it almost became routine. The process of storing became a normal part of everyone's day, there was nothing unusual about it.

Now, when the 7 years of famine came they were ready. Why? Because they had made storing a normal part of their life and it was now paying off when people became

hungry. They had food to eat because they had taken the time when things were going well, when things were normal to store up for times such as these.

These 7 years of want were not a crisis for Joseph and Egypt because they had used the 7 years of plenty to prepare. There was famine in every country but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. For the vast majority of us we live our lives if not in a time of plenty, then certainly as folk who have what they need. Think about it, our needs are minimal for the most part. We have our houses, our cars, our families, our spouses, our pets, our jobs. The list could continue. We live lives where our greatest concerns are not food, shelter, and clothing but maybe health, wealth, and leisure.

These are not crisis lives that we read about in Scripture or hear about as we learn about this ever shrinking world. But what I have found is that as a people we are becoming more and more spiritually starved. Now, we've tried to do our part in changing that with our 90 Day Challenges which so many of you are following. We have our Bible Studies and our various programs, but nevertheless even here in this church we are slipping in our spiritual formation. Our Sunday School classes, the adult ones, are becoming smaller and smaller. When we have midweek prayer times, Monday evening, Tuesday morning, Thursday morning, they are less and less attended, some of them only have less than a handful of people. Our church attendance is up, that is doing great, but what happens if we dig deeper?

How do we combat that? How did Joseph do it? He stored up. He supplied himself and all of those around him with stored treasure in the form of grains. How do we live our lives as faithful Christians when we are not being persecuted daily but when people generally like us? How do we be faithful to God when we love our Savior, we believe, and we really want to grow and be nudged and even challenged in our faith journey?

Today, we are called to a season of celebration and preparation. The celebration takes place within the community so getting involved and getting to know your brothers and sisters in Christ is the best way to celebrate the risen Christ and you will be shocked to see how this will provide you with a wealth of opportunities to see your faith at work. You know, that's what Jesus was talking about in Mark in regards to his disciples and them not fasting. They are celebrating with the bridegroom, they are rejoicing because

Christ is with them. That's okay, being a Christian doesn't mean being sad and serious all the time.

But...be careful...Being a Christian also doesn't mean that we are entitled, or even that God wants us to be blessed materially. God makes it rain on the just and the unjust as Matthew states. What we have materially in life is not a reflection of our faith. Blessed are the poor, not cursed, or not unfaithful. You see, one can prepare when things are going well in your life. If you are in the midst of a famine or a crisis preparation is not a top priority but survival is. It is in times of plenty, of relative calm that we need to be open and willing to prepare in order to deepen our relationship with Christ.

Now Joseph prepared by storing grains. We need to prepare by storing and building up moments of intimacy with our Savior. Storing Scripture that you begin to read on a daily basis starting today. It's not too late to pick up the 90 Day Challenge part II. Storing up moments of intimacy in a time of daily prayer that you begin this evening in the quiet of your home with the TV off and the kids, or the spouse, asleep.

It is so important to store up these intimate times with our Savior. So often when a crisis or a moment of doubt or anger arises we don't know how to deal with it because we aren't prepared. What would have happened if Joseph had only started saving the grain the last year of the time of plenty. They never would have made it through the other seven years.

Can you understand now why when a loved one is sick or you begin in earnest to pray for something that you are presently going through that maybe you will not get the answer or result you want. If you begin now to prepare by reading Scripture daily and praying to our Savior daily then you begin to store up the grain, the relationship now for a famine or a crisis that might occur years from today.

In Mark Jesus tells us that when he is on the earth then it is a time when preparation is not needed but rather celebration will be the word of the day. But, when he is gone, then the preparation needs to take place. The bridegroom is gone, Jesus was talking about now as the time that we need to reflect and discipline ourselves to daily Bible reading and daily prayer.

We will then find ourselves, like Joseph, prepared for those inevitable times of crisis. But if our walk with Christ is something that becomes a part of our daily life,

something we become used to and something that develops consistently, then crisis will become trials to overcome, and times of famine will become opportunities to grow as we use the relationship that we have built up and stored away for times such as these. Amen.