

God's s forgotten language. A sermon preached in a summer series on the life of Joseph at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: GENESIS 41:1-41

JAMES 1:2-4

Last week's reading found Joseph still in prison – forgotten by the cupbearer who was given freedom and said he would not do – what he has done – forget Joseph

Another reality illustration from scripture – the frequent amnesia of people we have once helped.

Chapter 41 picks up Joseph's story 2 years after the cupbearer's forgotten promise

2 years of Joseph having to wait

2 years of wondering whether he will ever be free

Not a long time you say in the span of a life

It's a very long time if you have to live through daily wondering – is today the day for release

2 years can be a real "how long O Lord" time

When Joseph's release comes,

It is not owing to the cupbearer's remembering Joseph for his listening ear of prison kindness.

Rather it is the cupbearer's recall of Joseph – the dream interpreter.

Pharaoh has had two dreams dealing with plenty and want

Two dreams connected with the Nile

For Pharaoh and Egypt, the Nile is not only a point on a map – it is also an expression of the imperial power of fertility

It IS the administration of the Nile then which permits Pharaoh to generate and guarantee life!

If for whatever the reason, the Nile fails – it means that the Empire does not have in itself the power of life

Little wonder then that when Pharaoh wakes up from the 2 dreams – plenty and want; plump and thin; ugly and sleek – referring to cows and grain, Pharaoh's **spirit was troubled (vs.8)**

Another example of Biblical understatement!!

I suspect the whole palace was in an uproar

Agitated rulers who are considered to be almost gods in their country,

Do not put up with supposedly the best in the empire magicians and wise men that cannot do what they are supposed to do – interpret dreams!

I wonder – was Pharaoh prone to these startling night visions or was this a recent development in his life.

The same cupbearer who said he would never forget Joseph but did,

Sidles over to Pharaoh and mentions Joseph's name as one who can interpret dreams.

A Hebrew who interprets dreams – what have I got to lose – send for him!!

Joseph is sent for,

Cleans up well and before he knows it is in the presence of Pharaoh of all Egypt.

What is clear as the story proceeds is that this is not the Joseph of early years

Joseph's latent leadership talents now come to the fore.

Joseph has not become a man of action

For not only does Joseph interpret Pharaoh's dreams,

Emphasizing that **it is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer.**

Joseph also suggests a plan of action

Joseph makes such an impression on Pharaoh and his court that when the plan is suggested,

All are agreed that only Joseph can carry out the plan.

39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." 42 Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck.

Since God, says Pharaoh – germ of belief in Joseph's God?

The former forgotten prisoner,
Wrongfully accused
Caught up in an abuse of power by the wife of his
former employer
Sold into slavery,
Cast into a pit and left for dead by his brothers is
now #2 in Egypt – answerable only to Pharaoh
The arrogant little so and so who years before had
interpreted a dream that got him into trouble with
his brothers
has interpreted another two dreams – this time –
clearly acknowledging that God is the one who
interprets dreams.

Big difference!!

We should not underestimate the task facing
Joseph.
He has to convince people that times of plenty are
inevitably followed by periods of scarcity.
That is basic economics and it is still hard to
universally accept today!
As well, Joseph has to deal forcefully with another
human trait – we are reluctant to plan for rainy
days, while the sun still shines!!

What reminders can we lift up from this part
of the Joseph story?
Well certainly the most obvious is Pharaoh's
dreams and Joseph's interpretation of them.

What does this text then say about dreams – one commentator calls –God’s forgotten language.

Though only Joseph and Daniel are given the skill in scripture to interpret the dreams of others,

Dream, do figure importantly in other places in scripture – most notably in the story of the Joseph of the New Testament – the father of Jesus, the husband of Mary.

Paul also speaks about a dream that impacts his missionary work.

The subject of dreams in scripture is a broad one.

We cannot do it justice in one sermon or in this morning’s case, part of a sermon.

It is best deal with in a series of message or a study over several weeks.

If this is a subject that intrigues you,

I can recommend some books written by people, who have their feet firmly planted on the ground,

Are staunch followers of the Risen Christ,

And have spent years reflecting upon and

researching the matter of dreams in general, the

dreams in scripture and how the Christian faith and church have treated dreams over the centuries.

In the light of this morning’s reading though, permit me to make some considered observations.

I do not believe dreams in the Bible are only flakey filler to the story

Why? Because I firmly believe that there is both a physical world AND a spiritual world all around us.

I believe that God uses a variety of ways to reach down and touch people through such ways as dreams, thin places and visions.

I am a great support of Hamlet's statement to Horatio in Shakespeare's play Hamlet

*There are more things in heaven and Earth Horatio/
Than dreamt of in your philosophy"*

Our knowledge as humans is limited.

That is really frustrating to some

The truth though remains – dreams come to us neither from the acceptable material world nor from our well-ordered and controlled reason.

I also believe that the interpretation of dreams is much more than buying and reading a book on dream interpretation and symbolism.

For ultimately as Joseph says to Pharaoh

It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer. (vs. 16)

As well, it takes time and skill to understand and interpret the dreams of another

We have to listen to our own dreams if we are to help others understand theirs.

We must know God if we are to recognize the
divine significance in dreams

That is, be open to the voice of God.

We must also come to know a great deal about the
other person, about his/her conscious life and
his/her convictions

So if you want to be serious about this
matter of dream interpretation – begin to think
about your own dreams and their significance,
Begin to try to remember your own dreams,
Write down what you can remember and ask –
what are YOU trying to tell me, teach me, Lord?

That is,

Begin and remain anchored in God

Be open to the reality that God may well be trying
to tell you something in your dreams.

I submit that this morning's portion of the
Joseph's story *also points to the reality of WAITING
and the reality of God's sovereignty over all things*

After two whole years chapter 41 picks up the
story.

The story teller has given his readers an important
detail

Joseph had to WAIT before he was freed from
prison.

We are not specifically told what he did or what he
learned while he waited.

But the Joseph who faces Pharaoh in chapter 41 is a very different Joseph from chapters 37-40.

He has a maturity that conveys a number of things:

- Humility – God is God and we are merely his creatures. We are his beloved creatures,
The crown on his creation,
But we are still just creatures.
We recognize that we exist for God’s sake, not he for ours
- Life is a gift, not a right
- The importance of delayed gratification
- Hope – This is my father’s world, that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
- Someday – in God’s time

Hear me,

Waiting is rarely if ever easy

Even waiting in line can cause some to go into fits of impatience and deep sighs of frustration.

And this is a minor waiting compared to the major waiting that often besets us – I think of the thousands who are waiting to return to their homes when the I/C people give the all clear from fire danger. What will they face? Do they rebuild if it is all gone? How?

--I think of families
who are watching helplessly as a family member
moves into dementia or must deal with a life
threatening illness.

Not easy!

But as a beloved senior colleague and mentor told us at the beginning of our calling as parish ministers – *most of the Christian life is spent learning to wait.*

A lifetime truth that becomes more ingrained year after year, example after example.

Though at the time, I thought it to be the most banal things he could have said about our situation!!!

I would add one more related truth – learned by experience – *as important as the things we wait for is the work God wants to do in us as we wait!*

Waiting then is not just the thing we have to do until we get what we hope for.

Waiting is part of the process of becoming what we hope for!

God's sovereignty over all things.

Clearly evident in this morning's reading.

It is a reality we would do well to hold to and remember because all around us it seems the givens of even a decade ago – ethics, morality, consumerism, empathy, grace, simple kindness and respect are in freefall.

It has though been most heartening to hear the stories and see the postings of the random acts of kindness toward the evacuees from the wildfires.

However, there is abroad in this world a sense of entitlement – that we are owed this life

A sense that we are central

A sense that we are not answerable to anyone or anything.

A sense of being in self – run rampant!!

A significant reality from this morning's reading in Genesis is that however much worldly power, force and sense of dominance Pharaoh had, *He is nothing compared to the power and sovereignty of God.*

Even though God is not specifically cited in the text, The story makes it clear that God is the One with whom Pharaoh finally must deal

Joseph clearly states that the future of Egypt does not depend upon Pharaoh.

Pharaoh, however worldly powerful, does not get to decide.

He is actually irrelevant and marginal to the future of the kingdom.

In appointing Joseph,

The future of Egypt is out of Pharaoh's hands.

Here we have through Joseph, the power of God, contrasted with the feeble power of Pharaoh
Here we have a key reminder through the scriptures *God has the capacity to work newness against administered convention.*

Here then we have announced the free, sovereign God is at work in the very centre of Egyptian existence!

Pharaoh can cause no future – God can and does in this case – affect through Joseph (a Hebrew and foreigner) the salvation of Egypt and its peoples’.

Over and over again, the sovereignty of God puts the powers of this world in their place – the Exodus, the prophets and I think my favorite is Jesus’ simple reply to Pilate’s

Do you know that I have power to release you and power to crucify you?

You would have no power over me unless it had been given to you from above.

That declaration holds for all people and for all – no worldly power is greater than God

No person who holds any level of worldly power is greater than God.

The former forgotten Hebrew named Joseph is now second only to Pharaoh of the Egyptian Empire.

Looks like its smooth sailing so to speak.

With careful management of resources, Egypt will survive.

But what about those brothers of his?

Have we heard the last word on them? NO!

The story teller of Joseph is about to tell us about what happens when “the brothers come a callin”