

## Pastor's Ponderings      September – October 2023

In our Sunday morning scripture readings and my sermons this summer we've been following the story of the people of Israel—the story of how the people of Israel came to be the people of Israel, the people in the land of Israel. Beginning in Genesis chapter 12, the story unfolds from the blessings and promises made by God to Abraham and Sarah on down through the generations to the call of Moses, the Israelite's escape from slavery in Egypt, and the time of wilderness wandering in Exodus up to the brink of the Promised Land in Deuteronomy. It is at times a sordid story with lying and cheating, faithlessness and infidelity among the very heroes of the faith as well as among the people as a whole at times. It is clear that the ways and the work of God on earth do not depend on purity in the human heart. God's purposes are carried out and carried on by very flawed human characters. But one character does stand out as resolutely honorable and faithful.

Joseph, Rachel's son and the youngest and favorite of her husband Jacob (who is also called Israel) is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and becomes a household servant in Egypt where he is falsely accused of wrongdoing and imprisoned. He is eventually exonerated and because of his visions and wise insights he is ultimately made governor of Egypt under direct authority of the pharaoh. When a time of drought and famine strikes the land, the Egyptians continue to thrive because Joseph as governor has stored up great supplies of grain to carry them through the drought. So, when Joseph's brothers come down to Egypt in hopes of buying grain to stave off hunger among their people back in Canaan, they discover, to their shock and horror, that it is their brother they sold into slavery who now has the power and authority to feed them or kill them, or do whatever he wishes! Joseph chooses to forgive them. He does not even blame them for what they did. Rather, he credits God for bringing him to Egypt by means of his brothers' evil intentions and for placing him in a position of power, enabling him to rescue all of his father Israel's people from the ongoing drought by bringing them under his care in Egypt.

Later, there is a new pharaoh in Egypt who enslaves the Hebrews (Israelites) rather than honoring Joseph, but Joseph remains honorable, gracious, and faithful through it all. Joseph chooses repeatedly to see the good that can be found in whatever evil befalls him, and he chooses to be generous, faithful and forgiving at every turn.

It is a choice we all have. We will all experience evils and hardships in our own lives. We are all treated unfairly or betrayed or afflicted at times. Our challenge is to see the good in whatever evils befall us, and to embrace and care for even those who have afflicted us.

Joseph's life is a critical turning point for the people of Israel. They could have all starved to death without Joseph's benevolent provisions through the additional 5 years of drought that persisted after they came under his care in Egypt.

Our choices toward benevolence and generosity can be a turning point in our own lives also, and in the collective lives of the communities to which we belong. We can choose to begrudge our burdens and bad fortune, or we can look for and embrace the good that is in our life. Embracing the good is always the better choice for ourselves as well for those around us.

May we do so.

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