

November 9, 2015 "I'll Get Through This" Pt. 3 Genesis 39:1-10

This series of messages is probably the most personal series I have ever preached. As I am sure everyone knows by now it comes out of the crisis of my own diagnosis with cancer, the ensuing surgery on May 29th, and the crises (plural) that have arisen since. There have been moments of severe debilitating pain..and yet as a general statement I would have to say my treatment thus far has been for the majority of the time pain free. Physically pain free. It is the closest thing I have experienced to Joseph's being thrown in the pit, and sold into Egypt, a life altering season of problems and challenges.

I have prayed and prayed. The Biblical Word has been my constant source of encouragement. The support of this faith community and especially the relationships that we have developed with you have been key. Your prayers have been felt. Your words have been kind. And the Lord has been close. I have sensed the reality of His Spirit in a fresh, new way. And I have also seen in a special way, that we all face difficult problems. It is part of being alive and living in a world affected by the huge problem of sin, and that we all need encouragement. The church ought always to be an encouraging force, in God's name.

If the story of Joseph reminds us and reveals to us anything it is that you do not face one problem, solve it or get through it, and that's it. You solve one challenge only to be faced by another, and then another, big ones, smaller ones, devastating problems, problems that seem unmanagable, and problems that remind and reveal we do not have control of life. That being in control is an illusion. Reality is something like that carnival ride

called the bumper cars. You hit somebody. Somebody hits you. And then the one you really did not see coming, came as if out of nowhere. Wow!

Genesis 39 reminds us that problems are continually erupting in the lives of those Bible heroes we have read about time and time again. And the story of Joseph reminds us, of something that is really important to our survival and thrival indeces. I'll get through this. I say I will, because problems are personal. We can't solve them for others. We can't sometimes solve them for ourselves. But by the grace of God we get through them. Sometimes we look like the walking wounded from a battlefield engagement. Some of us need "crutches". Some of us are being born on stretchers. Some of us are bandaged and able to walk. Some of us have casts over our broken hearts. Some of us are finding it hard to believe, or to continue to believe. And yet here we are clinging to the cross of Christ for dear life.

Joseph was sold into slavery. The traders transported him to Egypt. The old life of privilege is gone. A strange new land. A strange culture. A language he has to learn. And yet if there is one detail that springs off the page it is this. Joseph kept his wits about him when some would have been utterly crushed by the experience. He apparently learned the language and learned it fairly quickly. It became apparent to his owners the Ishmaelites that he was no dummy. No details about that but clearly they thought it was a good idea to sell him to Potiphar, a soldier and a man of influence in Egypt, captain of the palace guard.

Potiphar was obviously a rather special man too. No dummy himself. It did not take long for him to grasp that the young

slave from Israel was really worth something. He was more than just a servant. He was well built. Muscled. One of those guys who naturally has a V shaped chest. But he was able...more than able. Potiphar is not just looking for someone to lift and tote and grunt. As I said, Joseph obviously was a fast learner where the language was concerned. He was housed in the house of Potiphar. And Potiphar liked what he saw. He observed that the Lord was with Joseph.

Ever wonder how he discerned that? It is one of my questions. Potiphar did not put it down to dumb luck. Somehow he has learned that Joseph is a man who believes, whose belief affects the way he lives, the way he does stuff, the way he serves. I assume he probably became aware that Joseph was a man of prayer. Maybe Joseph was one of those guys who said things like, God bless you. Or maybe even in his loss of status, he said and shared that God blesses him in the unfolding of each day. Somehow Potiphar became convinced, that what he had in Joseph was a man of character. Liked him. And then even more...trusted him. Do you realize how hard that must have been? Joseph is a foreigner. Speaks with an accent. At times struggles to get the words right. Potiphar is an officer and a gentleman. Not just a captain, a captain in the Palace Guard. He's been around. I suspect he was cautious about putting trust in somebody. He comes to trust Joseph...big time.

First thing Potiphar noticed about Joseph was if you gave him something to do, it got done. And it got done in a timely fashion. If you gave Joseph a problem to solve, he got it done, handled it well. In a timely fashion. Potiphar was impressed by the young foreigner with his faith and his ways of handling people. Makes you wonder where that came from...he hadn't shown these gifts with his

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family back home. He offended his father drove his brothers mad, to the point of wanting to kill him. So Potiphar chose Joseph to be his personal servant. Joseph never disappointed Potiphar.

In fact Joseph was so impressive in this role of personal servant, Potiphar became convinced he was a talented administrator. In time, and we are not told how much time it took, Joseph was put in charge of running of the house. Captain of the Palace Guard had responsibility away from home. Joseph made him look good because the home was running as though Potiphar was there and in charge himself. Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything he owned. Incredible. And Jacob tells us...remember he is telling this story...and interpreting the details...Jacob says to us by God's grace, the result was the Lord blessed the household of Potiphar. There was peace in the home. Everything that needed to be done got done. Potiphar's agricultural holdings produced more than they had produced under the oversight Potiphar had done himself. So Potiphar got to the point that the only thing he concerned himself with was the menu for dinner. "We'll have roasted lamb tonight, Joseph. See to it."

This is a true story. Real life. So you shouldn't be surprised it could not last. And of all the places from which problems could arise! Joseph was well built. Well, he was a farm boy wasn't he. The kids I have known that were raised on the farm always seemed to be strong and fit. Joseph was. Handsome young man too. This is where the story gets tricky and sounds more like the plot for a film at the movie theater than something you would expect in the Bible. Potiphar's wife has been watching Joseph too. And she has decided it would be worth it to have an affair with Joseph. She literally invites him to bed with her. Holy mackerel!!

Remember the words of the survivor's guide that Max Lucado has shared with the world? "I'll get through this. It won't be painless. It won't be quick. But God will use this mess for good. In the meantime...don't be foolish or naive." It would have been so understandable if Joseph had said, "Sure. Your room or mine." He carefully explained his understanding of the trust and responsibility that Potiphar has placed in him. He declines her offer. He is not being foolish...nor naive. He knows that doing the wrong thing, the immoral thing, (she is Potiphar's wife for heaven sake...that means God knows what is happening), Joseph does not succumb to the temptation of a moment's pleasure, when he knows it would be the wrong thing to do. He is also not naive, he realizes this problem has to be handled sensitively. Has he ever grown up since he talked to his brothers about his dreams.

He works at not being alone with Potiphar's wife. He works at being discreet. And when she continues to make it clear... "anytime, anywhere"...Joseph continues to try to do the right thing. When we are vulnerable, our lives stood on end and shaken, it is always a good thing to ask the question, what would Jesus do? What does the man or woman or young person who is God's person do in a situation like this? Does the Bible address this issue so that I can know what God would have me do now? A time for prayer, for guidance!

Life is lived in the midst of a stew of problems. Some of them are really painful. Some of them are really upsetting. Some of them have the word disaster written all over them. You will get through this. No, not without pain, tears, suffering. No, probably not quickly. We really wish it would go away don't we. We wish everything would be sunshine and roses. Never is, really. There is a

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serpent in the garden with us, looking to bring us down, to destroy the work that is blessed by God. Somehow God will use this mess...problems...yours and mine...for good. In the meantime, do not be foolish. Use your head. Remember whose you are, bought with a price. Rest in the grace of God. Remember Jesus is at your shoulder. Don't be naive. Wishing won't solve things. Momma used to say if wishes were horses beggars would ride. You have to walk that lonesome valley!

I'll get through this. You will get through the problems that beset you. Because the bottom line is always the same. You are not alone. God is in the game, and He is on the field. Jesus loves you. His Spirit, the holy Spirit of God watches over you. With God's help you will get through this.

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus, be with us in our hour of need. Raise us up to walk on mountains. Grant us the creativity to turn lemons into lemonade, and painful things into moments of praising your name. Comfort us, even as you have promised. Hold back the waters, and show us the road home. Amen