

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost; August 6, 2023

Genesis 39:1-6a

“Think Like God”

**When Joseph was brought down to Egypt, Potiphar the Egyptian, who was an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guard, bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down to Egypt. The LORD was with Joseph, and he became successful. He served in the house of his master the Egyptian. His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made everything that he touched a success. Joseph found favor in his sight. Joseph served him, and he made Joseph manager of his household. He put Joseph in charge of everything.**

**From the time that Potiphar made him manager of his household, in charge of everything that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s household for Joseph’s sake, and the blessing of the LORD rested on everything he had, both in the house and in the fields. So he left Joseph in charge of everything that he had. He did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.**

In your family, who is the favorite child? Of course in your culture no parents would ever admit to having a favorite, and would go out of their way to hide it if they had one. But that’s your culture. Not mine. I was the favorite of twelve sons in my family; some were brothers, some were half-brothers. But I was most definitely the favorite.

Not only was I the son of my father’s old age, but I was also the son of his preferred wife. Clearly, I was his favorite. And he did not try to hide it. A few minutes ago you heard about my stint as a slave in the house of Potiphar in Egypt.

I got there in large part by being my dad’s favorite. His name was Jacob, and my mom’s name was Rachel. Jacob did not try to hide my status as his favorite son. He made it plenty clear to my older brothers. And wouldn’t you know it? They resented me for it. They also resented me because God gave me dreams to show that I – the youngest – would one day rule over them. And wouldn’t you know it? They resented that, too.

But “resent” isn’t quite strong enough a word. They hated me for it. They wanted to kill me for it. They even made a plan – kind of impromptu – to dump me in a cistern and leave me for dead. But I did have one brother named Reuben who sort of saved me. He spoke up and saved me from murder. He said, “Yeah, throw him in the cistern; teach him a lesson; but don’t kill him.”

So they did. And then another brother, named Judah, came up with another plan. He saw some slave traders passing by and asked, “Why not make some money off this thing? Why not sell him, then fake his death? That way we get rid of Golden Boy and get money, too.”

And that’s how I came to the house of Potiphar. At least, that’s why on the surface. So, I worked hard for Potiphar, who was a big wig for the king, Pharaoh. And you heard how well things went. So well that Potiphar could sit back and watch me run everything for him. And did you notice something as you were listening? Why did I end up there, in Potiphar’s house, with everything going so well? **The LORD was with Joseph, and he became successful...His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made everything he did a success...the blessing of the LORD rested on everything he had...the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake.** It seems there’s something that Moses – who recorded these true stories later on – wants you to notice. He wants you to notice it so much that he says it four times in five

and a half verses, to make it impossible to miss. The Lord was behind all of this, and working through all of this.

That was hard to imagine when I was at the bottom of that cistern. Even harder to imagine when the slave traders tied me up. Harder still when I stood on the auction block and Potiphar paid for me. And so my story is often used – and you can understand why! – to comfort God’s people when things are looking bleak, maybe even hopeless, in their own lives. “Look at Joseph! Remember what the Lord worked for him through terrible things in his life! God will work things out for you, too.”

That’s a commendable and useful way to put my story into motion for people of your day. But there’s a bigger way to think about this. It wasn’t just about God working things out for me. If that’s all it was about, he could have moved Potiphar to release me from bondage to serve him freely, kept blessing me and him, and made me rich, healthy, and happy under Potiphar’s roof for the rest of my life.

But the Lord did not keep me under Potiphar’s house. Instead, he took me to prison for life. After Potiphar’s wife made scurrilous and salacious accusations against me, Potiphar had me thrown into the same prison as Pharaoh’s own prisoners. As you might guess, that’s not a good place to be. That’s a prison you go to and stay in.

But I didn’t. The Lord was with me again. And I don’t have time to go into all the details – you have it in your Bibles, just read the closing chapters of Genesis. The Lord got me out of that jam, too. Because yes, he had a plan. But it wasn’t just about me and my life. It wasn’t even mostly about me and my life. It was an eternal plan.

The Lord used me years later to forgive and feed the same brothers who had once sold me into slavery. He used me to keep my whole family alive. And that family was key to God’s eternal plans, including his eternal plans for you. It was that family that the Lord multiplied and blessed for hundreds of years, even as they were slaves in Egypt. It was that family – by then called Israel – that Moses finally led out of Egypt to the Promised.

And it was from that family, that nation of Israel, that your Savior and mine was born. When God was looking out for me and protecting me and saving me and prospering me, he had you and all believers in mind. He was working to keep his salvation promises. He was looking far ahead to Christmas night when his Son would be born just where he promised, just how he promised.

My story is really about God’s plan for your eternal good. In fact, the whole Bible is all about God’s plan for your eternal good. Even before the Bible was written, even before there was any history to play out, God already had his plan. He knew you and chose you before the foundations of the world, and then worked everything with the goal of having you with him for eternity, with your sins washed away in the Savior he sent.

So now can I ask you a question? Your Savior tells you in the Gospel today that you, too, should think with eternity in mind. And you might say, “But I don’t have the mind of God! I can’t plan for all eternity as he can!” That’s true enough. But there are some things you do know about eternity, and you can focus the use of your time, your energy, your money, your everything, with eternity in mind. It’s how God thinks. And it’s how you should, too.

True enough, you don't know everything about eternity. But you do know this: eternity is real. And all humans, when their lives end in this world, face a judgment. Everyone will spend eternity in one of two places: heaven or hell. And where they spend it depends on where they stand with Jesus at the moment of their deaths.

Here's some more you know: It's not your job to make anyone believe in Jesus. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. But it is your job to use everything God has given you in this world to bring the gospel of Jesus to human ears and hearts, because the good news of Jesus is what the Spirit uses to create that saving faith.

So how do you use what you have for eternity? Does your money go to that gospel work? Does your time go to praying for missionaries? Do your words speak Jesus' love to your children and your friends? How faithfully do you focus what you have on eternity?

Of course God has given you responsibilities here on earth, too. You have a job to spend time on. You have kids to spend money on. You have a whole life to focus your mind on. But that's just the thing. That's where you turn wrong. You see that as a separation, as two different things. There are the things of this world like a job and family and grocery shopping that need your attention and then there's only so much left to devote to the kingdom of heaven.

But what if...you thought more like your Savior? What if the Spirit changed your mind to see everything on the eternal plane? To see even the things that you think of as strictly worldly as opportunities to work for the eternal salvation of souls. You know that's what God was doing in my story. He worked through things that seemed only worldly – father and brother and hatred and betrayal and slavery and master and lies and prison – to preserve and advance the promise of eternal salvation in his Son.

And when that Savior came, he saw everything the same way. There are endless examples, but maybe one that stands out most clearly. When your Savior knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was surrounded by things of here and now. Friends and enemies and lies and betrayal and, more than anything else, the prospect of horrific physical pain and spiritual anguish. And with all those things of this world pressing up against him prayed, **“Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”** Jesus knows there is an eternal matter at hand, even with so much temporary and physical swirling around him. And where is your Jesus' mind? On eternity.

And because it is...how will he treat the soldiers and the governor and cross and the tomb? He will use it all for your eternal good. He will use his arrest and trial to complete his life of perfect obedience. He will use his cross to remove your sin and open heaven to you. He will use his grave as the hammer to smash yours. He saw the things of this world all around him. And he used them for eternity.

Now think like your heavenly Father, and the Son he sent. Everything God puts in your life is an opportunity to work for eternity. But first your mind has to be there. First your mind has to be on the love of your Father, and all he did to keep the promise of a Savior. Your heart must rest on Jesus, who worked for your eternal salvation. When your mind is there, you'll see everything in your life as an opportunity to work for the eternal good of others.

Your house won't just be a physical place where you make meals and raise kids and host friends. It will be a place where Jesus is spoken and taught. Your coworkers won't be just people you happen to share a carpet with and earn money with. They will be eternal souls who need Jesus. Your money won't just be

what you use to pay bills and buy groceries. It will be what you use to spread the gospel and to make more friends who can receive God's grace from your words.

As God planned my life, he did everything for eternal purposes. Jesus came and lived a life here, in this world, but all he did he did here he did for your eternal good. Think like your loving Father and his Son. Use everything he gives you, and everything that happens to you here, for the sake of your eternal good, and the eternal good of those around you. Amen.