
A MIRACLE OF MIRACLES**Sermon for the 3rd mid-week Lenten Service 2022****Genesis 39:1-21**

Grace and peace to you all from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The text for our sermon tonight is Genesis 39:1-21, our First Reading from before: ¹ Joseph was taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian, an official of Pharaoh and captain of the bodyguards, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. ² However, the LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man. He was in the home of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD used to give him success in everything that he undertook. ⁴ Joseph's master was kind to him, and Joseph became his servant. His master put him in charge of his household and entrusted everything that he owned to him. ⁵ After the Egyptian appointed Joseph over his household and over everything that he owned, the LORD blessed his household because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything that his master had, both in the household and in the field. ⁶ He left everything that he had in Joseph's charge. Because he had him, he did not concern himself with anything except the food that he was eating.

Joseph was well built and good-looking. ⁷ After these things, his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

⁸ He refused. He told his master's wife: "Look! Because I am here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house. He has entrusted everything that he has to me. ⁹ In this house my master is no greater than I am. He has not withheld anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this very wicked thing and sin against God?"

¹⁰ Although she kept talking to Joseph day after day, he refused her requests to lie beside her and even to be with her. ¹¹ One day he went into the house to do his work, when none of the household servants was there in the house. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" However, he left his cloak in her hand, ran away and went outside. ¹³ When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run outside, ¹⁴ she called her household servants. She told them: "Look! He has brought us a Hebrew man to play around with us. He came to me to sleep with me, but I screamed. ¹⁵ As soon as he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me, ran away and went outside."

¹⁶ She kept Joseph's cloak with her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him a similar story. She said: "The Hebrew slave whom you brought to us came to me to play around with me. ¹⁸ However, when I screamed for help, he left his

cloak beside me and ran outside.”

¹⁹ When his master heard the story that his wife told him, “This is what your slave did to me,” he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph’s master arrested him and put him in prison, in the place where the king’s prisoners were held. So, Joseph was there in the prison. ²¹ Nevertheless, the LORD was with Joseph and extended His mercy to him. He made the superintendent of the prison kind to him.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Commenting on tonight’s text, Luther calls it “a miracle of miracles” that Joseph doesn’t lose hope, that Joseph doesn’t lose faith, that Joseph doesn’t give in to temptation and lose his virginity in a shameful and wicked sin - it *is* a miracle of miracles.

Let’s not forget that Joseph was just a boy. Or was he a man? He was seventeen years old when his brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites. We aren’t told how old Joseph was by the time he rose to prominence in the house of Potiphar. But let’s say that he celebrated a birthday somewhere along the line. Let’s assume he’s eighteen. “**Joseph was well built and good-looking.**” He also has the kind of character and faith and wisdom that few men of any age possess.

The devil is attacking Joseph on two different fronts. On the one hand, the devil is tempting him to doubt and despair and defeat, leading him to conclude that he’s been forgotten and forsaken by God - even as he was betrayed by his own brothers. How easy it would have been for Joseph to abandon the faith he had been taught by his father! How easy it would have been to give in to despair and depression - or to be consumed by hatred for his betraying brothers.

As if that wasn’t enough, Potiphar’s wife is trying to seduce him “**day after day.**” It would have been so easy to give in to that temptation - so easy for Joseph to justify a sexual dalliance. After all, what harm would there be? Who would ever know? But Joseph does not waver or equivocate. He calls adultery what it is. He calls sexual immorality what it is. He says, “**How then could I do this very wicked thing and sin against God?**”

From where does Joseph get this strength and clarity of character? How does he so clearly differentiate between right and wrong? And remember, he’s got no Sixth Commandment to draw upon, no catechism to consult, no pastor to preach to him. The two tablets of stone and Mount Sinai are still over 450 years in the future, and Luther’s Small Catechism is more than three thousand years down the line. Neither can Joseph

crack open his Bible for strength and guidance to sustain him in his time of trial as there was no Bible written yet! All Joseph has is the Law of God written in his heart and the promises of God passed down from his father. And yet, with only those little crumbs to draw upon - miracle of miracles! - faith reigns in the heart of this young man. Two thousand years before the apostle Paul would implore the Christians at Corinth to flee from sexual immorality because their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit¹, Joseph fled from sexual immorality, recognising that his body was a temple of the Holy Spirit.

This has all been written down and recorded for us. It's being preached and proclaimed for us because the temptations to sexual immorality and adultery are everywhere today. Potiphar's wife, with her promises of sex and sin without consequences - she's everywhere. She's on our television and computer screens. She's in our phone - that phone that never leaves our side and happily hides all our secrets. The devil never quits, never eases up, never stops seeking to violate our chastity and destroy our faith.

And so this episode from the life of Joseph comes to confront us here tonight. And we know that this episode is true - that it really happened - because of the Bible's brutal honesty. **"¹⁹ When his master heard the story that his wife told him, "This is what your slave did to me," he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph's master arrested him and put him in prison, in the place where the king's prisoners were held. So, Joseph was there in the prison."** Even though Potiphar's wife lied about the actions of Joseph, nevertheless, Joseph descended into the hell of prison. Why? Because of Joseph's great faith and his steadfast refusal to sin. He did nothing wrong, yet he was punished.

If that's what happened to Joseph - whose faith and life was above reproach in every way - should not we expect far worse? With our faltering faith and our sin-filled lives? We should indeed expect nothing but temporal and eternal punishment were it not for our new and greater Joseph.

Jesus is our new and greater Joseph. He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Jesus took on the temptations of a thousand wives of Potiphar and never, ever, took the bait - never did what would have been convenient or easy and pleasurable. Why not? Because He battled temptation for us - as our sacred Substitute. Where we fail, He succeeds. Where we stumble, He stands firm. Where we are weak, He is strong.

And - miracle of miracles! - Jesus undertakes a great exchange with us. He takes

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

our guilt and gives us His innocence. He bears our sin and absolves us of everything. He drinks deeply from the cup of God's wrath against our sin, so that we might sample the sweet wine that is His blood once shed for us, for the forgiveness of all our sins. He takes our punishment and dies our death so that we might die to sin and rise again to life everlasting.

Just like Joseph, Jesus humbled Himself and made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave. Just like Joseph, Jesus went around doing good in all things: preaching the Gospel, casting out demons, cleansing lepers, giving sight to the blind, feeding the hungry, stilling the storms, and even raising the dead. But for Jesus - like Joseph - there would be no applause or accolades or promotions. No good deed would go unpunished for this good man. Shouts of "Hosanna!" would give way to cries for crucifixion. The Apostle John writes, "*He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him*" (John 1:11). One of His own even betrayed Him with a kiss.

So it goes for Jesus. So it goes for Joseph. And so it goes for you. When Jesus, like Joseph, takes on temptation, it is for you.

This world will little note nor long remember the times when you stand firm against temptation. When you, by the grace of God, lead a sexually pure and decent life in what you say and do - when you say no to sin and yes to the Lord Jesus, who loves you and has given Himself for you - the angels may be rejoicing, but their cheers won't reach your ears. Luther says, "You must never hope the world will acknowledge... your faithfulness and diligence, for it does the opposite" (*Luther's Works* 7:97). Like Joseph, your good conduct could even land you in prison, or worse.

But, miracle of miracles, you are precious to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Holy Baptism, He has made your body to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. You belong to the Lord - body and soul - redeemed by Christ the Crucified. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.