
WAIT FOR THE LORD
Sermon for the 4th mid-week Lenten Service 2022
Genesis 41:9-16, 25-44

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

The text for our sermon tonight is Genesis 41:9-16, 25-44, our First Reading from before: ⁹ **Then the chief cup-bearer spoke up to Pharaoh. He said: “Today I must mention my faults. ¹⁰ When Pharaoh was angry with his officials, he placed me in custody at the house of the captain of the bodyguards, together with the chief baker. ¹¹ He and I each had dreams in the same night. Each of us had a dream that matched its own interpretation. ¹² A young Hebrew was there with us, a slave belonging to the captain of the bodyguards. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us. He told each of us the interpretation of his dream. ¹³ Our dreams turned out as he had interpreted them: Pharaoh restored me to my position and hanged the other man.”**

¹⁴ **Then Pharaoh sent some men to call Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the dungeon. He shaved, changed his clothes and came to Pharaoh. ¹⁵ Pharaoh told Joseph: “I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it. However, I have heard that, when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.”**

¹⁶ **Joseph answered Pharaoh: “I cannot do it. However, God will give Pharaoh an answer that indicates his welfare.”...**

²⁵ **Joseph told Pharaoh: “The dreams of Pharaoh mean the same. God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years. The dreams are the same. ²⁷ The seven skinny, ugly cows coming up after them are seven years, and the seven empty heads of**

grain scorched by the east wind will be seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is just as I have told Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁹ Look! Seven years are coming when there will be great plenty throughout the land of Egypt. ³⁰ Seven years of famine will follow them, during which a famine will exhaust the land, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. ³¹ The plenty will no longer be remembered in the land because of the famine that follows. For it will be very severe. ³² The reason why the dream has been given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will make it happen soon.

³³ “Now therefore, Pharaoh should choose an intelligent and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt! ³⁴ Pharaoh should do this and should appoint overseers over the land and collect one-fifth of what the land of Egypt produces during the seven plentiful years! ³⁵ They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and, under Pharaoh’s authority, heap up grain for food in the cities and store it there! ³⁶ This food should be a reserve supply for the land for the seven years of famine that will occur in the land of Egypt, that the country may not be ruined by the famine!”

³⁷ Pharaoh and all his officials approved the advice. ³⁸ Pharaoh asked his officials, “Can we find anyone like this, a man who has the Spirit of God in him?”

³⁹ Then Pharaoh told Joseph: “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as perceptive and wise as you are. ⁴⁰ You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people shall obey your instructions! Only in regard to the throne shall I be superior to you.”

⁴¹ Pharaoh told Joseph, “See! I have hereby put you in charge of the entire land of Egypt.”

⁴² Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger. He dressed him in fine linen and put a golden chain around his neck. ⁴³ He had Joseph ride in his second chariot of state. People called out

ahead of him, “Bow down!” Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of the entire land of Egypt.

⁴⁴ Pharaoh told Joseph, “Although I am Pharaoh, no one throughout the land of Egypt will raise his hand or his foot without your permission.”

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

Dear friends in Christ,

For the past few Wednesdays, we’ve been hopping, skipping, and jumping our way through the trials and travails of Joseph. But the downside of compressing Joseph’s life story is that it is reduced down to a speedy series of events. Time gets telescoped. Joseph seems to move quickly and seamlessly from tragedy to triumph. He has some really bad days but, then, some really good days. He’s down, and then he’s up. And, of course, we know this story. We know how it ends, and we know that the ending is a *happy one*.

But what this approach to Joseph’s life fails to convey is just how long he had to wait for the Lord to act - how long he languished in an Egyptian dungeon with nothing and no one to give him hope and encouragement. Tonight’s reading ends after Joseph had successfully interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams about good cows and skinny cows. Having proposed a plan to save the world from famine, Joseph becomes the highest-ranking official in the Egyptian empire. While that is good news, we have to realise just how much time had elapsed since Joseph’s brothers had sold him into slavery. That was thirteen years earlier. The brothers sold Joseph at age seventeen, and he entered Pharaoh’s service at the age of thirty.¹ And although we don’t have an exact timeline for what happened when, Joseph certainly spent most of those thirteen years in prison.

¹ Genesis 41:46

Joseph teaches us the virtue of waiting - of waiting for the Lord in faith. Joseph is a living, breathing object lesson in the patient waiting that is part and parcel of the Christian life. The Bible is full of such encouragement. From the Psalms, we hear: “*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, . . . my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning*” (Psalm 130:5-6). And from the prophet Isaiah, we have the wonderful promise that “*they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength... with wings like eagles*” (Isaiah 40:31). The apostle Paul reminds us that “*we walk by faith, not by sight*” (2 Cor. 5:7). We base our hope on *what will be*, not on the way things now appear. We walk - and we wait - in faith.

Consider how long Joseph had to wait in prison. Joseph had spent the prime of his life rotting away behind bars - an innocent man among criminals. He must have been tempted to take matters into his own hands - to plot an escape, to incite a riot, or to take advantage of the guards with whom he had curried favour. But no. Joseph just waited; he waited for the Lord and for the Lord’s deliverance. From this, we can only conclude: Waiting for the Lord is not weakness, but strength. Waiting for the Lord is not an expression of fear but of faith.

But you know well that our sinful flesh doesn’t see things that way. Our flesh despises all forms of waiting. Our sinful nature cannot bear to wait. There are road works going on in the district. How well do you wait for the lights to go from red to green? How well do you wait your turn to be served at the local post office or at the doctor’s office? Of course, all of those things are really superficial, first-world problems - like when the power goes out for a few hours or that spare part takes a couple of days to arrive. How bad that is!

But there’s a different kind of waiting - a waiting designed by our gracious God to draw us into deeper faith and greater hope. When we are assaulted by false accusations and persecution like Joseph was, *we should wait patiently for the Lord*. When we face chronic illness or chronic pain, *we should wait patiently for the Lord*. When temptation is

about to entangle you - when you lose your job, when you go through bad seasons, when your savings drain away, when loved ones leave the church and leave the faith, when life overwhelms you and you're just barely treading water - wait. Just wait. Don't despair. Don't take matters into your own hands but *do* place matters into the nail-scarred hands of Jesus. Wait for the Lord.

Don't do what Peter did. Learn from Peter what *not* to do. Peter had been so bold and brave as he pledged his loyalty to the Lord: "*Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death*" (Luke 22:33). But at the first sign of trouble, Peter quickly distanced himself from Jesus. At the first sign of danger to himself, Peter did a little double-talk to save his own skin: "*I do not know Him*" (Luke 22:57). As Jesus was led away to trial and torture - at a moment when Peter should have engaged in faithful waiting - Peter denied the Lord Jesus three times.

Faithful waiting doesn't come naturally to us. It comes, rather, *from God Himself*. For, unlike Joseph, *we know* where things are ultimately headed. *We know* what God has in store for us. In Joseph's wildest dreams, he could never have imagined he would one day be "**in charge of the entire land of Egypt**" - that he, with the help of God, would save the people from famine. The Lord gave Joseph more than he deserved and more than he desired. And we know that too. We know that, for the sake of His dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Lord will also give us more than we deserve, and even more than we desire. We know that our waiting will come to an end one day - and that end will not disappoint us.

The source of all our hope and confidence, the foundation of our faithful waiting, is Jesus. Like Joseph, Jesus was a true son of Israel. Like Joseph, Jesus sank into the depths and was raised up to new heights of power and authority. Like Joseph, Jesus worked a deliverance for the whole world - a deliverance not just from famine but from the power of sin and death. "*God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them*" (2

Cor. 5:19).

Jesus is God's beloved Son, who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven. *"He emptied Himself, took on the form of a slave and became like other human beings; and, when He was found in the appearance of a human being, ⁸ He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ That is why God also has very highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every other name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven and on earth and under the earth may kneel, ¹¹ and that everyone may confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil. 2:7-11).

Our lives unfold much like Joseph's life - not quickly and seamlessly, but sometimes slowly and with much difficulty and tribulation. So we wait with faith and confidence in our Saviour. For the foundation of faithful waiting is found *in Jesus*.

We entrust to God all our days and all our burdens, for through faith in Jesus, our sin is atoned for. Our guilt is taken away. Heaven stands open. For now, like Joseph, we have good days and bad days, triumphs and tragedies. But *we know* how our story will end - and that the ending will be a joyful one.

When your days in the dungeon of life drag on, wait for the Lord. What does this waiting look like? Luther summarised it this way: he said that in such times we should conclude, *"I know that I have been baptized, that I have eaten the body and drunk the blood of the Son of God, that I have been absolved by divine authority, that all my sins have certainly been forgiven me, and that victory over the devil, death, and hell has been promised me. What more should I ask for? That is what Joseph concluded"* (AE 7:132). Amen.

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