

May 11, 2024  
The Seventh Sunday of Easter  
Pastor Matt Duerr

### God's Narrative: Under Pressure

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our LORD and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. As we continue with God's narrative, we pick up where we left off last week. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Sold to the Ishmaelites. Judah had the grand idea to kill him and throw him into a cistern, but Ruben talked them out of that and didn't kill him, put them in the cistern, and then when the Israelites came, they sold him.

What's interesting is that the next chapter of Genesis, chapter 38. Deals with Judah, the one who through Jesus traces his lineage. Chapter 38, it's more of the soap opera. It's about Judah. His two eldest sons who both were killed. Because they were evil in the sight of the Lord. And then there's the third son and the daughter-in-law who was married to the first two sons and Judah, and there's lies and there's deception, there's prostitution. There's even great hypocrisy, as Judah calls for the burning of his daughter-in-law and then realizes what a hypocrite he is and finally he does what is right. So, if you want a really exciting and entertaining chapter, go read Genesis 38 and you've got a great soap opera.

We're going to skip over it. We're going to go to Chapter 39, where we're going to see a true example of doing what is right. And as I was thinking about this sermon and preparing for it in my mind and what all, another song came to mind. This time it's not from Joseph and the amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. No, it's a song titled "Under Pressure" by David Bowie. It goes like this: Pressure Pushing down on me. Pressing down on you. No, man can ask for. Under pressure. That brings a building down. Splits of family in two and Puts people on the streets. And then after each little verse, there would be a "dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun; Under pressure."

Under pressure. You want under pressure, take a look at Joseph. He was hated. He was sold by his brothers, sold into slavery. And understand if you were sold into slavery, it meant you were going to be a slave. It meant you were sold into hard labor for whoever bought you. It most assuredly assured you a very short life. You would literally be worked to death.

We read that Joseph was sold to Potiphar. Potiphar was an officer of Pharaoh. In fact, we read that he was the captain of the guard. That would be the equivalent today in the United States of being the head of the Secret Service, those in charge of protecting the president, the Vice president and those in those areas of responsibility. This was Potiphar. And we read that the Lord was with Joseph. And he became a successful man. Hardly the words for a slave, right?

We continue to read that Potiphar for saw this and I quote, “God caused all that he did to succeed in his hand.” So, Potiphar saw that whatever Joseph did, it was going right. Because God was there. God was blessing him. So, the result, Joseph I quote; “found favor in his, (that is Potiphar’s) sight.” And Potiphar, again I quote, “put him in charge of all that he had.” And we read that the Lord blessed Joseph. And in the process, it blessed Potiphar, so that Potiphar, again, I quote, “had no concern about anything but the food he ate.” Putting that into the modern “Duerr” version of the Bible. Potiphar didn't worry about anything other than the menu for the day. What his chefs would prepare for him. Not a bad life when you have someone like Joseph working for you.

What comes next? Well, it was at the very end of our Old Testament reading there in verse six, we read that Joseph was handsome. And that is a perfect setting and a perfect setup for scandal and that's right, you got it, the Biblical soap opera. Joseph was handsome. It continues that he was handsome in form. In other words, he had a great body. And in appearance. Which meant he took care of himself. You could have a great body but you could dress like a bum and not shower and not cut your hair. Not Joseph, no he had a good appearance. He took care of himself. And he dressed well and the other carried himself well.

Preparing this took me back to my years as a teacher. Take the students to Washington DC. You want to know who carries themselves well? The soldiers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. They are upright, they are precise and when they walk, or when they would come and talk to the students, boy, they carried themselves very well. This was Joseph. Potipher's wife saw this and her reaction? Well, drum roll please, the soap opera again. She says to Joseph, "come lay with me." Or in other words, let's have an affair together. And Joseph's response, and he had to do this multiple times because she kept making this overture to him. His response was "I won't. How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" And oh how I pray for people like that today, especially within the church, and I would love to see it within the leadership in our country and state!

But one day, she makes that overture to Joseph, but this time she grabs Joseph, and he resists, and he takes off, and he leaves his coat in her hands, and he flees. And you have a woman scorned. And what is her response to this? 'Rape! He tried to rape me!' And she told Potiphar and Potiphar threw Joseph into jail. "For doing the right thing." But he didn't believe him. He believed his wife.

Now we read. He was thrown into jail where the Pharaohs prisoners were confined. This is a special jail for those who have offended Pharaoh. And if you offended Pharaoh, you went there to die. Or to shall we say, repent, change your ways, and plead that Pharaoh might restore you or forgive you. It was not the place you would want to be. And yet we read that the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper, that is the warden of the prison. And what did that warden do when he saw what kind of individual Joseph was as a prisoner? He put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. Not only that, we read that he paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge. Why? Because whatever Joseph did the Lord made it succeed.

What was it? All that he did. What was it? It was his life and how he worked. Joseph did what was right or righteous. Joseph saw himself as working for the Lord. Not for Potiphar. Not for the warden. But for the Lord. Again, consider how he responded to Potiphar's wife. It wasn't that

I would be so offending your husband, no. How can I do this wicked thing and sin against God? There's a tremendous insight here into Joseph. Joseph consistently sought to glorify God. In all he did and in all the circumstances. And thus, the Lord was with him. Because Joseph was faithful to the Lord and had faith in the Lord, and the Lord had steadfast love, stayed with him even in the worst conditions. I'd like you to think about this. The worse the condition or the greater the pressure you are under, when you stay true to God and do what is righteous, it brings more glory to God. Yes, our being here today and worshipping the Lord in God's house, it brings glory to God. How much more glory would it be to God if this was outlawed in this country, people were executed for worshipping God, and in the midst of those kinds of situations, we keep doing what is right? The more pressure, the worse the condition, the greater the glory to God.

And so, we have a tremendous challenge today in the Church, and I think we need to look to Joseph and his life to help us understand what we need to do. We do not, as Christians, as the Church, buy into societies' victim storyline. You know, it goes something like this: well, I can't succeed because of the past wrongs of the ancestors, those people. I can't succeed because of my race. I can't succeed because of my gender identification. Talk about a victim! If you want a victim, take a look at Joseph, he's the walking definition of a victim.

How are we to live? Like Joseph. And where else do we see it? We see it in God's people. We see it in His own Son. Under pressure, take a look at Jesus on the cross. He did what was right. He prayed for those who were executing Him, for the religious leaders who wanted Him executed, for the soldiers who were spitting on Him. Jesus prayed. It's Jesus who went against society and went to the House of Zacheus the tax collector because it was the right thing to do. He was coming to seek and save the lost. It was Jesus who rebuked the disciples who were withholding the children from coming to Him, and He welcomed those children. "Suffer the little children to come to Me and forbid them not for such is the kingdom of heaven. Society said those children aren't worth anything until they're able to work in the field. Jesus said they're worth

something right now. He did what was right and he had those children brought to Him. Jesus touched and He healed those who were sick, those who weren't clean. Touching them made Him unclean. But wait, He healed them so, were they unclean anymore? No. Jesus did what was right.

Fast forward and take a look at Saint Paul and Silas. They're in prison, Acts Chapter 19, it's midnight. They're in prison unjustly because of a riot that was started by someone else. And what were they doing at midnight? They were singing and praying, singing hymns to God. There's an earthquake, the doors of the jail open, and all of their shackles fall off. The jailer hears the noise, hears the talking and that they are free. He knows they're going to leave. He takes out a sword and he is going to kill himself. And we hear that Saint Paul calls out to him, 'Do not harm yourself. We're all here.' The jailer assumed that all these prisoners who were behind bars and shackled, now that the bars were open and the shackles were gone, were going to leave. And he'd be blamed, and he'd be executed. He didn't want to be crucified. I have to ask; since we read that the jailer brought in lights so that he could see the prisoners and see Paul and Silas. If he had to bring in lights, it would have been dark before. How did Paul know that he was going to kill himself? The power of the Holy Spirit.

What happens as a result of this? The singing, praying, obviously telling the other prisoners. Hey, stay put guys, this is God at work here. I've got to save this this jailer. He and Silas go and witness to the jailer and his household that night. The jailer and his whole household were saved, were baptized. When we look at Joseph, look at Jesus, look at Saint Paul, Silas; there's a message here a lesson that says. "Always ask yourself what is right? What will glorify God?" And then like the Nike commercial says, "Just do it!" Get over all the hangups. Oh but, my skin color, Oh but this, Oh but that. Get rid of it! Just do what is right and what will bring glory to God. Even when, or might I say, especially when you're under pressure.

Amen!