

That's Life

Before I start, I have to acknowledge the other presence in this presentation. I am preaching in our sanctuary!

We all know that a building does not make a church. There is a church this side of Publix that says, on its sign, "The Church is Open. The Building is Closed." I thought that was pretty good. A friend of mine was speaking to the press after his church burned down in LA. They pressed him: "How does it feel to have your church burn down?" He looked at them and said, "My church didn't burn down. It's working today in Los Angeles and Bel Air and all around the area. This building burned, but my church didn't." We know that we don't worship the buildings.

And yet, *so much* of our life is right here. I've placed many of you where you sit. I see your names staring back at me. And if you were here, you could place a dozen or two dozen

people by where they used to sit, but now they sit in the heavenly choir. This is a place of memories, a place that was built by the generosity of our members and the generation before this one. It is part and parcel of our town--a land grant by Mr. Canon himself. And when you all return, we are going to rededicate our church, and this wonderful sanctuary, and all our facilities, to the work of the Lord. And we are going to celebrate! (Let's go to him in prayer right now.)

As we return to Joseph, he is little of like all of us right now. Like us, he has lost his place in the world. He has lost his place of worship, his place of where his family met, his sense of who he is in the scheme of things--it had all disappeared back there in Dothan when his brothers sold him to the Midianites traveling to Egypt to sell their wares. Joseph had gone from a beloved son to just another pot or spice they were going to try to move in the big city.

And move he did. He was sold to a man named Potiphar. That brings us to our next scene in the story:

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

2 The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. 5 From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. 6 So Potiphar left

everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Let me stop right there. Since we know the story, we tend to gloss over this a bit. But think what has happened! The boy Joseph had been living among a bunch of brothers who, well...let's be honest...they don't receive much notice in the Bible. We're not spending weeks telling the story of Judah. Joseph was the outstanding one.

But when you are at home, you don't quite know that is true. Albert Einstein got a teaching degree in physics from Switzerland and then spent the first seven years of his career working in a patent office.

I'm sure he was a gifted student, but that is where the greatest genius of a generation...maybe of all time, spends his time? Seven years! But here's the difference

between you and Einstein: while he was there, he kept thinking about the Newtonian Laws of physics and how they did not adequately describe the emerging laws of the electromagnetic field.

That's exactly what you would have thought, right? Sitting there in that patent office, on slow days, he develops a little theory that we know as $E=MC^2$ --the Theory of Relativity. As they say, the rest is history.

I think it is a measure of his genius that scientists are STILL proving him right. Only two weeks ago I saw an article saying that a star orbiting the Milky Way's giant black hole confirms Einstein was right. He postulated this in 1915 and only now can we prove him right.

Amazing.

My point is, back at the Patent Office, no one knew what young Al had under the hood. Well,

Joseph had been at the Patent Office. He was the twelvth goatherd in his family.

But he had some talent that was ready to blossom. And our text is very clear on who caused that talent: It says, "...the Lord gave him success in everything he did."

The charge to Abraham of old was that he and his seed would be blessed to be a blessing. Now that blessing has gone with Joseph into Egypt and God is honoring that promise.

Maybe you have known some success. That podunk you started out in wouldn't recognize who you have become. In certain ways, you have some gifts that no one could have predicted. You may not be coming up with the Theory of Relativity, but you are pretty good at what you do.

Thank God for what he put into you. Thank him for blessing you and his favor. Yes, Joseph worked hard to rise up from nothing to where he was. And so did you. But if we forget who

brought us here, we do so at our peril. Zechariah 4 reminds us: “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.’”

This past week I was praying for people as we handed food out to them in their various cars. Or sometimes they came to us on foot--older ladies who could barely walk. I would lean into the cars and there would be four guys in there and, without saying a word--heck, just by taking one look at the old car they were driving--I knew there were more troubles in those lives than I could shake a stick at. “Could I pray for you?” I asked. They all had something they needed prayer for and way more than they told me about.

It was a pleasure to be with the teams handing out food. And it is a tremendous blessing to be the one giving rather than receiving. Thank God for his blessings on you, for the success he has given you, and the fact that any one of us

could be riding in one of those cars but for the grace of God.

So Joseph has arisen beyond anyone in Potiphar's house. He now runs a small company. We can imagine dozens of workers, many suppliers, all kinds of projects happening at once. But there is one more element to that household that he is not in charge of: Mrs. Potiphar. And she is about to upset his early career.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, 7 and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" 8 But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. 9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" 10 And though she

spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

13 When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, 14 she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. 15 When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

16 She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told him this story:

"That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated

me,” he burned with anger. **20** Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.

It may surprise you to know that I know Mrs. Potiphar. Yep. In fact, I just celebrated my 26th anniversary with her this past month. A few years ago (quite a few years ago) we put on the musical *Joseph and the Amazing, Technicolor Dreamcoat* for our church.

As it happened, one of the brothers dropped out of they play so they asked me to take his part. I told them they only loved me for my beard. My lovely wife, Cindy, was already cast as Mrs. Potiphar.

In fact, around that same time, David Cassidy and his wife were touring in that show, where he was Joseph and she was Mrs. Potiphar. So David Cassidy and I were kind of the same, except he had talent.

Someone knew them and bought us tickets and arranged for us to meet David and his wife

backstage. I said to David, “You know, it is a fun show. But the best part is being married to Mrs. Potiphar, don’t you think?”

If you have seen the show, it is a wonderful ride and every single line is sung. Except, one. That is Mrs. Potiphar’s line. The narrator is telling the story of Joseph, the music breaks, and Mrs. Potiphar says, “Come and lie with me, love.” And that is pretty much what she says here in our text. Joseph says, “No! How could I do that to Mr. Potiphar. He has entrusted me with everything!” Joseph keeps his head down and does his work.

But don’t you think that the rest of that household was a little jealous of this guy Joe? Here he is, this young forigner, and all of a sudden he has leapfrogged over the pecking order and runs the whole thing! They all saw hottie Potiphar eyeing Joe and they thought, “Great. This is our chance.”

Joe, for his part, stays true. He is not going to deceive or lie or cheat his way forward. The message is clear to each of us: If you want God's blessing, live in a godly way. Don't cut the corners. Don't take the bribe. And don't canoodle with Mrs. Potiphar. God is in charge of your rising up and here is the other truth: if you take a fall, God has you there as well. One day, the scene she had been prepping for is played out: she goes from asking to demanding. She assaults him in "Fatal Attraction" style. And he runs away--naked! She tells a story with tears to to her big, strong husband when he comes home, holding out Joseph's robe. All the other servants nod and shake their head in disgust. "That is exactly what happened," they intone. The setup is complete: Joe goes into the slammer.

That's life, isn't it? I've titled my sermon after the Frank Sinatra hit that tells it like it is. One of the lyrics of that song says: "You're riding high in April/Shot down in May." Here we are

at the first Sunday in May. How's it going for you?

So many people are riding a roller coaster these days! The business was making money--maybe not a lot, but enough. The other employees were doing OK. Then, bam! A virus tears through our land and the whole thing goes kaput! I heard a woman speak who ran a \$50M floral business. Now, they are scrambling to try to get some flowers sold for Mother's Day. A once growing empire is teetering on the edge of disaster.

And the question is, where is the Lord in this? Our text has an answer: he never leaves. The Lord is in the test results that declare you are five years cancer free. And the Lord is right there when you discover that cancer has returned. The Lord is not only in our rising. He is also with us in our defeats. I don't mean to say he causes those defeats. He didn't give Mrs. Potiphar the idea to make some time with Joseph.

The point is to hold onto the fact that, even if you are on one of the harder points--even if it is May now and this is not your month, God is still with you. You still call upon him. The psalmist wrote:

*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”
These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.
Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,*

my Savior and my God.

Aren't you glad that the Bible is not just filled with happy songs? One of my beefs with popular Christian music or speakers is that they sometimes imply that life is always up and to the right. It is one, big joyride.

Anybody homeschooling their kids right now? Anybody wondering about the bottom line? We know that isn't the case. Sometimes you are up and sometimes, you go down.

And now Joseph is going down. Again. This time, it is not to a cistern. It is to the King's prison. Not the worst prison, mind you. But certainly an incredible fall from the heights of Potiphar's household to a cell, accused of deceiving his master and trying to steal what was not his.

I was going to leave the end of the chapter off and read it next week. But it belongs right here. Here is how it reads:

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Something has happened. The time between calamity and Joseph realizing that God is still with him has...shrunk. It seems that, almost immediately after coming into prison, it was clear that God was still with him. Maybe the warden knew Mr. Potiphar and he had seen what Joe was capable of.

Of course it is a disappointment to be in prison. But almost immediately, he is put in charge. Once again, Joseph knew that the story God had for him to live out was not done. He just didn't know quite where it was going.

I'll bet that is a lot like you. You don't know exactly where your story is going right now. Is there a promotion in your future, or do they sell to a company that is better positioned and your whole department is going to be cut? Is that child going to succeed, or will there be years of her struggling to just break even?

Most of us can safely say we don't know where the story goes. But can we affirm that, wherever it goes, God will be in that story? Can we decide, right now, that whether we are in Potiphar's house or the prison cell, we will turn our eyes to him and put our life in his hands? Whether we are in a position to hand out the food or we are in line receiving it, no matter what we are driving, we will realize the story is not done and he is walking with us. In the show, when he is thrown into prison, he sings one of the most powerful ballads. It is called, "Close Every Door." I want you to listen to it now:

*Close every door to me,
Hide all the world from me
Bar all the windows
And shut out the light
Do what you want with me,
Hate me and laugh at me
Darken my daytime
And torture my night
If my life were important I
Would ask will I live or die
But I know the answers lie
Far from this world
Close every door to me,
Keep those I love from me
Children of Israel
Are never alone
For I know I shall find
My own peace of mind
For I have been promised
A land of my own
Close every door to me,
Hide all the world from me
Bar all the windows*

*And shut out the light
Joseph
Just give me a number
Instead of my name
Forget all about me
And let me decay
I do not matter,
I'm only one person
Destroy me completely
Then throw me away
If my life were important I
Would ask will I live or die
But I know the answers lie
Far from this world
Close every door to me,
Keep those I love from me
Children of Israel
Are never alone
For we know we shall find
Our own peace of mind
For we have been promised
A land of our own*

There is a lot to that song, isn't there? We hear the whole history of the Jewish people in there, including the Holocaust. Over and over he says, "I know the answers lie far from this world." And, "Children of Israel are never alone."

Jesus said, "I am with you always." Always. In our going up and our going down. In April and May. You are never alone. Hold onto that, and walk with God through whatever you are facing right now. Let me pray for you.