

Genesis 39:6b-12, 16-23  
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
June 27, 2010

**Genesis 39:6-12; Genesis 39:16-23 (New International Version)**

<sup>6</sup> So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, <sup>7</sup> and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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?" <sup>10</sup> And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

<sup>11</sup> One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. <sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. <sup>17</sup> Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. <sup>18</sup> But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

<sup>19</sup> When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. <sup>20</sup> Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, <sup>21</sup> the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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.

Are you among the observers of our society who have questioned whether the quality of loyalty still exists? Situations producing the question are commonplace. Employers replace workers who had a long history of service to the company because they can find someone cheaper to hire. The sports team that suffers a losing streak soon sees the stands empty. Presidential approval ratings drop quickly. When it comes to marriage we see spouses who are quick to run off to the lawyer rather than allow time for God's Spirit to work through His Word and improve the relationship. That matter of allowing time relates to another missing quality, and that is patience. We are not a patient people.

Some wiseacre might be ready to say that I'm well qualified to comment about loyalty and patience as a fan of the Chicago Cubs for decades. Actually I have something more serious in

mind, as illustrated in this portion of the life of Joseph. Tuning in to these events leads to the encouragement

#### STAND FIRM

- I. Faithful in temptation v6b-12
- II. Faithful in reverses v16-23

The temptation came to Joseph just when conditions seemed to be improving. You no doubt remember the family problems of favoritism by father Jacob and the jealousy that resulted among the brothers. It grew so intense that some were ready to kill him; instead they sold him to slave traders who took him to Egypt. There he ended up laboring in the home of an official named Potiphar.

The Lord God had not forgotten about the young man. He blessed him and the faithful service Joseph rendered. Potiphar recognized his abilities and entrusted him with authority over his entire household. The home went well and prospered under Joseph's management.

Over the years Joseph grew up from the teenager who had started service. As he moved to the higher position, perhaps he also received better clothes. Potiphar's wife noted the young man and was attracted to the fact that "Joseph was well-built and handsome." She acted on her interest "and said, 'Come to bed with me!'" It wasn't a nap she desired.

I imagine the request was a shock to Joseph, something he had not expected. It may have aroused a response of interest on his part, for he possessed the same hormones as anyone else and the attention was flattering. He was far from home and the watchful eye of parents so may have entertained the notion that he could get by with it.

Whatever he felt, that's not what won out. Moses put it simply, "He refused." Joseph pointed to the responsible position he held in the household and the trust he enjoyed from Potiphar. There was also the fact that she was married to his master and the clincher: "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" He didn't cite the risk of an unplanned pregnancy, the fact that they might get caught, her age, or lack of beauty. His determining factor was, "What does God say?" His will is clear. All sex outside of or before marriage is wrong. Sexual intimacy is a gift only for those who are married and, by the way, that's a man and a woman. It was not just a sixth commandment issue. The first commandment was key. Joseph loved God most of all and did not want to violate His will. (I recognize the commandments had not yet been given in written form. Joseph acted on the basis of the natural law originally written in the human heart and the instruction he had received from his parents.)

Mrs. Potiphar, if we can call her that, didn't let up. She did not worship the true God, so didn't care about His opinion. She persisted in pursuing Joseph and watched for an opportunity. One day it came—or had she arranged for no one else to be around? She grabbed his cloak and made her luring request again. Joseph fled, as the Bible advises us to do with temptation. Don't think you can handle it. Stay away from tempting situations and leave when they occur. Doing so meant Joseph left his cloak behind.

He set for us an example of how to deal with temptation. How was he able to stand firm? He knew the Lord and His blessings. God's goodness motivated his faithfulness. It may seem especially amazing since Joseph did not have a supportive congregation where he was able to gather and grow in faith. The Bible had not yet been written for him to read after his household duties were finished. Believing parents had passed on God's truths. He shows us what decides matters when we face choices. It's not the circumstances, popular opinion, or our own desires. We don't vote on issues of right and wrong. God determines what is good and what is sin.

What if Joseph had succumbed to the temptation? Many people have done so. God's forgiveness is there, won by Jesus many centuries later. God's ready forgiveness does not

provide a reason to take sin lightly but it offers wonderful comfort to the grieving sinner. That full and free pardon renews and strengthens our desire to stand firm and to be faithful.

Temptations can involve other areas of life. The lure of riches, fame, acceptance, or power can also seduce us into disobedience. The call of God is the same: resist temptation, by the Spirit's power. Know and follow the will of God. Use Joseph as an example to encourage you. Stand firm.

## II.

God had more lessons for Joseph to learn. He was a work in progress like each of us. He calls on us to stand firm and be faithful in reverses. Matters got worse for God's servant. Potiphar's wife used the abandoned cloak as evidence against Joseph. She turned the accusation around and claimed Joseph had attacked her. What could Potiphar do? He couldn't humiliate his wife and take the side of a foreign slave. So off to prison went Joseph, although that was a bit of a reprieve. Egyptian law called for a thousand blows to be given to someone guilty of attempted adultery. Death was likely the penalty for trying to rape a free woman. Joseph's new home became the king's prison, a place for enemies of the state.

Put yourself in Joseph's place. What might you be thinking about now? "What's the use? See what faithfulness got me. That's the last time I'll follow God. Leave me alone!"

However, we see he still served both God and those around him. He was not in solitary confinement. He interacted with the other prisoners. His abilities were noted and he was put in charge of the rest. Later he had the opportunity to interpret the dreams of fellow captives. One was executed as he foretold and the other released, but he forgot about Joseph's ability for two years. He had to learn patience and waiting for God's time.

Although he might have felt overlooked, he was still blessed. Joseph had natural abilities, yes, but where did they come from? The opportunity to use one's abilities and their successful employment is also from God. The text clearly identified the situation: "The Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did." He had not abandoned his servant. He never does. He promises to be with us always. And He keeps His promises. Don't give up.

The Lord's blessings became obvious later. The Pharaoh had dreams that no one else could understand and Joseph was asked to interpret. He did so, gave advice for handling the situation revealed by the dream, and was released from prison. He ended up with a high position in the government, next to the Pharaoh in power. Eventually Joseph and his family were reunited.

It is easier to see the direction of God afterwards, when you know the whole account. It is not so easy when you are sitting in the dungeon. Nor is it easy when you are submitting your umpteenth application for employment with no response or showing kindness to someone and getting slapped in the face. Do not give up your trust even then. The patterns of God are instructive. One of His qualities is that He does not change. He will remain good and loving always. We know He is a loving God because He sent Jesus to redeem us from sin with His death on the cross.

Another objection which our minds may raise is that Joseph was a superhero, at a level of faith which we can never hope to attain. Yet he was not perfect. He contributed to his original problems by blabbing about his dreams that showed him receiving honor from the rest of his family. Those reports fueled the ill will of his brothers. He also was a tattletale. He needed to grow and learn just like the rest of us. His greatness is all due to God. We have the same object of faith and source of believing. We draw on Christ's power for Christian living through His Word and sacraments. Use the Word with its examples and promises. Know the faithfulness of God and the love of Jesus. Stand firm. Cling to God in faith when temptations are swirling around you and life is troubling. He won't let you down and He won't abandon you. He will build your faith to stand firm. Look to Him always!