

Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC

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*Hindsight is God*

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*Let us pray . . .*

Years ago, my Spiritual Director told me that people were meaning-makers. And it's true, isn't it? We like to make meaning, make sense out of the events and the things that happen either to us or around us as we move through life. And sometimes those things don't make sense until after the fact.

Almost 12 years ago, Max and I left our home here in Whiting to help his mom out in southern Maine. His father was dying and we were in a position to relocate. We had no plan and no idea of a timeline.

A storm began brewing in my deep self during that time and that led to anger, depression, various forms of lostness, professional help and seminary of all things.

I'm now convinced that God was at work through all of that, but I couldn't see it at the time. However, I now interpret all that happened as part of a bigger dream of God's because if you'd known me 12 years ago? You'd never think I was good pastor material.

So this morning we wrap up our story on Joseph, which also wraps up the Book of Genesis. As I reflected on Joseph, it occurred to me that he too liked to make meaning and sense out of all that happened in his life — whether it be dreams or the way his life rolled out, Joseph liked to interpret what was happening.

And as a person of faith, he always gave the thanks or the glory to God. Whether that glory was for his ability to interpret dreams or that glory was for the betrayals by his brothers, Joseph put all the glory in the hands of God.

You see, because of his ability to interpret dreams — Joseph ends up becoming the Pharaoh's right hand man and second in command over all of Egypt. He won the lottery when he ended up on the other end of the Egyptian slave market. And he interpreted it all as God's sending.

And this morning we heard that when his brothers came to him and he revealed his identity to them, he is able to forgive them — but as I thought about it,

he was able to do so only *after* he had perspective,

only *after* he had the passage of time

and no doubt only *after* he had the space to understand what had unfolded in his life.

So while maybe it looks easy to give God all the glory when everything works out and you're not on the receiving end of suffering, such grace is hard won. That's why this story is so important,

because it didn't start out that way . . . .

Genesis 37:4 tells us Joseph's own brothers hated him. In the same chapter, verse 18 tells us they had planned to murder him, but in verse 23 they tone it down to a kidnapping. After mulling all the options over, verse 28 tell us they "settled" for selling him into slavery, which carried a high likelihood of ending in death.

So Joseph's story is perhaps a reminder for us to know that God is at work in, through and across every nook and cranny of our lives with the understanding that we often can't see that until after the fact — in the same way Joseph ends up seeing that if it weren't for the betrayal of his brothers, he wouldn't have risen to the power that he did and they all would have starved to death.

So in verses 5 through 8a we hear Joseph give all the credit to God, *And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God;*

And it all started with a dream. Not Joseph's, but Pharaoh's —

only Joseph has the gift of interpretation and the rest is history.

Or was this God's dream for Joseph? Hmmmmmm.

And this morning, I would normally be giving my Blueberry Sunday Sermon following a week of festivities. That all started with a dream as well. And you are all part of the ongoing interpretation of that dream to such a degree that this would have been our 45th annual Machias Wild Blueberry Festival!

We'd have arrived this morning dog-tired and blueberried out. We'd be wearing this year's t-shirt design. We'd have favorite new tunes on repeat in our heads and new blueberry fairies to be proud of. We'd have known irritations and joys. Our feet would be killing us and the Tamborine Toccatas would have dazzled us once again. We'd have seen old friends and made new ones. We'd be counting the money and counting the pounds.

But most importantly?

While we'd normally be together doing this in the sanctuary this morning, the miracle in all of this is that **we're still together.**

For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, we are in a divine covenant with a God whose love for us is interpreted in an infinite number of ways, changing in understanding and experience as we — like Joseph — move through life gaining perspective, time and understanding.

And while we often don't seem to understand this until afterward,

*if at all*

remember that as people of faith, we tend to trust that our journeys here are but a blip in time and held in something larger. We trust that God has the full view. Trust that God's vision is always a perfect 2020. No hindsight needed.

So, we need the story of Joseph to remind us that God is at work in every place of our lives. From the most life-giving moments to the darkest and emptiest places, there is no where God will not go with us to make meaning for our sakes and God's purposes.

Just as I shared in the beginning of this sermon, have you ever had an experience that you did not understand or appreciate until you were well on the other side of it?

Beloveds, some day we will be on the other side of all the hard things we are going through, and my prayer is that one day — and maybe in a place and in a form you cannot even imagine or fathom in this moment — you too, will be able to understand and in turn, give the glory to God.