

Mark 2:18-20, Genesis 41:46-49,53-57

“Preparing in times of plenty”

The Sunday after Easter is an interesting Sunday. There is a popular myth that says that all the Cardinals who find themselves in Rome on that Monday after Easter gather in the Sistine Chapel, along with the pope, and tell jokes all day long to laugh in the face of death. What a great image for us, or as in the words of St. Paul: Death, where is your sting, Oh death, where is your victory?

What a great service last week with the youth taking the lead role. It didn't start off that well, however, it did start with a bit of a bang. I was asked to be here for the 11am Anglican service for Easter since the Bishop was in town, so I wanted to bring all of the communion material out to the car so Stacy wouldn't have to carry it. I picked up the box, opened the door, stepped out, closed the door, took two steps toward the stairwell when the whole bottom of the box gave out. All of the communion material crashed to the ground. The hundreds of little glass containers, shattered all over the hard tile, the big glass containers for the wine disintegrated into tiny fragments rolling down the steps, the two wine bottles exploded leaving wine on the walls and ceiling, looking like some was stabbed over and over again. I was left stunned, standing with the empty box. Stacy and the girls came rushing out to see me still holding the box.

It took we a while to be able to say He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed after that, but even when the bottom falls out, we can still rest on that assurance. This Sunday we are back with Joseph and he is in a very different place today than we have seen him up to this point.

I've noticed that over these past weeks as we have been focusing upon Joseph we have been stressing some fairly common themes such as God being faithful in times of crisis, when we are confronted with times of want we are to go forward. We have heard a lot of crisis preaching and yet I recognize that a vast majority of us do not feel that our lives are on the edge and that we are sinking deeper into a pit from which only God can salvage us.

Most of us live our daily lives one day at a time, things are going fairly well and we consider our lives to be fairly normal routine lives. Sure things come up but we deal with them when we have to. Most of us need to hear a message of how do we live our lives day by day in the workplace, at home, as we face the normal joys and

disappointments of life. Today we are going to see how Joseph as he breaks out into a life that is somewhat mainstream, how he lives his life. It is a life of preparation, of vigilance, of goals and strivings that he accomplishes because he is disciplined to do so.

This Easter Season, live your life as one of celebration, and preparation. You may not be fighting out of a pit or feel forgotten, but rather you need to hear a word of encouragement, feel a nudge to direct and guide you on your way. Today in Genesis we get that nudge as we are told to store up our spiritual strengths, to in a disciplined way commit to making goals of reading Scripture and praying.

READ

Karl Barth once said that every Christian should have a time during the day when they are to read Scripture faithfully and without distraction. We've heard that before, but he added that with the Holy Scripture we should have a newspaper in the other hand to make sure that we are not so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good.

With that in mind, this past week, Russia's finance minister, Alexei Kudrin, admonished the state for not preparing and modernizing sufficiently in their year of plenty during the oil boom, so that now their spending is not justified at their current income levels and their budgets are way off.

Basically, he said, we did not prepare in our years of plenty for these years of want. That sounds familiar. It sounds like what our main character, Joseph, had warned Pharaoh about. Young Joseph at 30 was entrusted by Pharaoh in the years of plenty to store the food and keep track of that which was put aside. Now these 7 years of plenty were so plentiful that at a certain point they had gathered and stored so much they could not count it all. Joseph was very good in what he did.

You get the idea that in these years of plenty the storing and keeping of food was so down to a science that it almost became routine. The process of storing became a normal part of everyone's day, there was nothing unusual about it.

Now, when the 7 years of famine came they were ready. Why? Because they had made storing a normal part of their life and it was now paying off when people became hungry. They had food to eat because they had taken the time when things were going well, when things were normal to store up for time such as these.

These 7 years of want were not a crisis for Joseph and Egypt because they had used the 7 years of plenty to prepare. There was famine in every country but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. You know, this community is so incredibly diverse in so many different ways. Think about it. Let's do a test. How many of you come from Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal, Episcopalian...How many from the Americas, yes Canada counts, Asia, Africa, Europe. You are the hardest group to preach to. But I normally find myself gravitating to address crisis issues which we mentioned before. But for most of you, you are not in a time of crisis, in fact, the opposite is true. For the vast majority of us we live our lives if not in a time of plenty, then certainly as folk who have what they need. Think about it, our needs are minimal for the most part. We have our houses, our cars, our families, our spouses, our pets, our jobs. The list could continue. We live lives where our greatest concerns are not food, shelter, and clothing but maybe health, wealth, and leisure.

In fact, living in Moscow has been a tremendous opportunity for many of you. Believe it or not even for missionaries it has been great years in so many different ways. These have not been crisis years. But what I have found is that I have never been in a place that is so spiritually dry and parched for the expat as Moscow. Now, we've tried to do our part in changing that with our Bible Studies and our various programs, but nevertheless Moscow tends to be a dry desert for our relationships within our families, and also with Christ.

How do we combat that? How did Joseph do it? He stored up. He supplied himself and all of those around him with stored treasure in the form of grains. How do we live our lives as faithful Christians when we are not being persecuted daily but when people generally like us. How do we be faithful to God when we love our Savior, we believe, and we really want to grow and be nudged and even challenged in our faith journey?

Today, we are called to a season of celebration and preparation. The celebration takes place within the community so getting involved and getting to know your brothers and sisters in Christ is the best way to celebrate the risen Christ and you will be shocked to see how this will provide you with a wealth of opportunities to see your faith at work. You know, that's what Jesus was talking about in Mark in regards to his disciples and

them not fasting. They are celebrating with the bridegroom, they are rejoicing because Christ is with them. That's okay, being a Christian doesn't mean being sad and serious all the time.

But...be careful...Being a Christian also doesn't mean that we are entitled, or even that God wants us to be blessed materially. God makes it rain on the just and the unjust as Matthew states. What we have materially in life is not a reflection of our faith. Blessed are the poor, not cursed, or not unfaithful. You see, one can prepare when things are going well in your life. If you are in the midst of a famine or a crisis preparation is not a top priority but survival is. It is in times of plenty, of relative calm that we need to be open and willing to prepare in order to deepen our relationship with Christ.

Now Joseph prepared by storing grains. We need to prepare by storing and building up moments of intimacy with our Savior. Storing Scripture that you begin to read on a daily basis starting today. Read over John and Genesis again this season of lent. Storing up moments of intimacy in a time of daily prayer that you begin this evening in the quiet of your home with the TV off and the kids asleep.

It is so important to store up these intimate times with our Savior. So often when a crisis or a moment of doubt or anger arises we don't know how to deal with it because we aren't prepared. What would have happened if Joseph had only started saving the grain the last year of the time of plenty. They never would have made it through the other seven years.

Can you understand now why when a loved one is sick or you begin in earnest to pray for something that you are presently going through that maybe you will not get the answer or result you want. If you begin now to prepare by reading Scripture daily and praying to our Savior daily then you begin to store up the grain, the relationship now for a famine or a crisis that might occur years from today.

In Mark Jesus tells us that when he is on the earth then it is a time when preparation is not needed but rather celebration will be the word of the day. But, when he is gone, then the preparation needs to take place. The bridegroom is gone, Jesus was talking about now as the time that we need to reflect and discipline ourselves to daily Bible reading and daily prayer.

We will then find ourselves, like Joseph, prepared for those inevitable times of crisis. But if our walk with Christ is something that becomes a part of our daily life, something we become used to and something that develops consistently, then crisis will become trials to overcome, and times of famine will become opportunities to grow as we use the relationship that we have built up and stored away for times such as these. Amen.