

Joseph - Wednesday meditation
by Reverend Victoria Ney

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I'm sure all of us are very tired of this "sheltering in place," although a couple of things have loosened a bit.) It's a very difficult time right now. You feel stuck. Stuck in isolation, you're inactive, you're in limbo. Maybe you're wondering why God doesn't intervene in all this. I've heard some folks asking the question "Is God good when life is not?"

A few of my friends have complained that they don't know what date it is, what day it is, what month it is. It feels like everything is in slow motion—like we're stuck in some waiting room. But make no mistake: while we wait, God works. And that's why I wanted us to take a few minutes to think about the story of a real-life person in the Old Testament—Joseph. Joseph is the prototype for how God gets people through rough times. So I think his life story is spot on right now for us.

If you remember, Joseph survived a global calamity. But he not only survived—he thrived.

After he was sold to the slave traders (by his brothers!), the first verse in Genesis chapter 39 says, "Joseph was taken down to Egypt." Think about it, how long did that trip take? Step by step across hundreds of miles of desert. Weeks? Months? Then he was a servant in Potiphar's house. Think how much more time went by before he was finally made "manager" of the household.

Right now I think we're well aware that time moves slowly. I'm sure it moved VERY slowly for Joseph, even when things got a little better for him as a slave.

But then he's falsely accused of something he didn't do and thrown into prison. Time stands still in prison. Verse 20 just tells us that "he remained there in prison." Remained. Six months? A year? Longer? We don't know. Verse 21 says that "the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love." Time was standing still, but God was standing with Joseph.

If you remember this part of Joseph's life, we then hear about the inmates in jail with him. Joseph interprets the dreams of two of the inmates—a baker and a cupbearer. He tells the baker that he will die and the cupbearer that he will return to his job in Pharaoh's house. The dreams both come true. When the cupbearer is released, he promises Joseph that he'll get help for him, the first chance he gets. I wonder if Joseph was so hopeful that he started collecting his belongings. Finally, there's hope that he'll leave that prison.

But then nothing happens. A day, a week, six months. The cupbearer forgot all about him. Joseph was stuck in his own version of quarantine.

Genesis chapter 41 tells us that two years pass before Pharaoh has his crazy dream. Two more years of prison for Joseph. At least 730 days of wondering and waiting. Sheltered in place. Plenty of time to give up. Plenty of time to get cynical. Plenty of time to get angry at God.

Then one day, Pharaoh has this dream that surely means something important, but his counselors are no help. They can't figure it out. Now Pharaoh can't sleep—he's so preoccupied with his dream. Finally, finally, the cupbearer remembers that Joseph interpreted his dream in prison. And so he tells Pharaoh about Joseph.

Pharaoh is desperate and has Joseph brought before him. Pharaoh says, "I have had a dream and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

Did Joseph answer, "No problem, Sir. I can do anything you ask."

No. Joseph says, "Not I, but God. God will put Pharaoh's mind at ease."

Notice that waiting did not ruin Joseph's faith. Waiting actually deepened his faith.

I know that right now you're isolated, you're sheltered in place, you're inactive, you're in limbo, you can't see your grandkids, maybe you're in between jobs. It feels like you're in God's waiting room.

If so, here's what you need to know. While you wait, God works. Our God is always at work. He doesn't take vacations. God doesn't twiddle his thumbs. Just because you're idle, doesn't mean that God is.

While Joseph was waiting, God was working. God put the cupbearer in place. God confused the counselors. God gave Joseph the wisdom he needed. God put everything in the right order.

I wonder if the Psalmist thought of this story when he wrote, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10).

You see, you **can** be still because God is active. You can rest, because God is working. Waiting is not fretting, worrying, getting anxious. Waiting needs to be a sustained effort to stay focused on God.

Psalm 37 gives us this advice: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. Rest in the Lord. Wait patiently for him." (verses 5 and 7).

You see, our job is to trust, to hope, to rest, to wait, to remain strong in the Lord.

Isaiah promises that "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They will mount up on wings like eagles." (Isaiah 40:31).

Right now, use this time to renew your faith, renew yourself in God. It will bring rest to your soul.

What God did for Joseph, God will do for you.