

Joseph: steward of God, steward of Pharaoh

Stewardship Sunday 2020 worship guide



Introduction

Each year, Everence provides a Stewardship Sunday resource for pastors and worship committees to consider for their own congregations. This year, we are focusing on stories of Joseph, working in the court of Pharaoh. He was called upon to be the right-hand man of a dictator. This role was fraught with moral dilemmas that arise when God's Kingdom and Pharaoh's empire collide. In Exodus 1, we read about this collision as the descendants of Jacob are enslaved by the new Pharaoh. What would you have done if you were in the sandals of Joseph? How do you strive to live as a faithful disciple and steward of Jesus when the lines get blurred? These are just a couple questions this worship service attempts to address. Adapt the material in a way that will fit your context and experiences as a congregation.

Call to worship

(This litany is based on readings from Psalms 100, 106, 107, 118 and 136 NRSV and share a common theme. Consider having the worship Leader lead with L, and Congregation respond with C)

L: We gather together today to worship – a response of gratitude to our God.

L: Psalm 100:5

C: For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

L: Psalm 106:1

C: Praise the LORD! O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

L: Psalm 107:1

C: O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever.

L: Psalm 118:1

C: O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

L: Psalm 136:1

C: O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever.



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I'm sure you've noticed a recurring theme in these five passages – God's goodness, his steadfast or unwavering love, and our response of thanks and praise. Stewardship is also a response to God. A form of thanksgiving and praise. As we hear God's word through scripture and sermon, be aware of the themes of thanksgiving, praise and stewardship and how they are a response of gratitude to our God for his goodness, faithfulness and steadfast and unwavering love for his people – long ago, today, and in the future.

Prayer of invocation

God, we come today to worship you and to give you praise and thanks for your unfailing love for us.

We confess that we often forget, that we take your goodness for granted, and that our lives often don't reflect the gratitude that should be present in our living.

Forgive us.

As we worship together, allow your spirit to move among us and within us. Nudge our hearts toward gratitude. Teach us to be good and Godly stewards of all you have entrusted to us in this imperfect world in which we find ourselves. Teach us new ways to bring your Kingdom to earth, to our communities, and to our relationships this week.

May your blessing be upon us as we worship together. Amen.

Children's time

Materials

A hat, scarf, shirt, or jacket and a special snack.

Method

As the children gather, choose one of the children whom you will use to help demonstrate the day's lesson. Say something like:

"Before we get started today, I want [name] to help me. The reason I asked [name] to help is because – I don't know if you knew this or not – but [name] is my favorite of all the kids in this church. Because [name] is my favorite, I want them to wear this special piece of clothing. That way, you'll all remember that [name] is my favorite. And because [name] is my favorite, I am going to give them this special snack to eat during the children's time this morning..."

Bible story

You could say: "Today we are talking about Joseph. We are going to hear about Joseph as a grownup; but in the Bible we also hear some stories about Joseph as a young person..."

- Joseph had 11 brothers and 1 sister.
- Joseph was his dad's favorite child.
- Joseph's dad gave him a special robe to wear to remind everyone that he was dad's favorite.
- Joseph's siblings got mad and wanted Joseph to go away.

Questions

- How did it make you feel when I chose [name] as the favorite this morning?
- What do you think you should do when you are given special privileges that others don't have?
- How can you be kind to those around you when you have things that others don't have?

Summary

Say something like: "Joseph learned as he grew up how to take care of others. He used his special talents, gifts, and jobs to care for other people. You may be the best at something. You may even be the 'favorite' sometimes. You might have a big, important job one day. Remember to find ways to be kind to others and use the special talents God gave you to take care of others. Now [name] is going to help me hand out a special treat for each of you to take with you. You might even share your treat with someone sitting next to you..."

Prayer

God, thank you for making each one of us special. Thank you for giving us special gifts that we can share with others. Help us to be kind to each other. Amen.

Offertory prayer

God, we give back to you in thankfulness what you have given to us in your kindness. We acknowledge that the world and its resources are not ours but yours, and that you have put us in charge as your trustees. Help us to exercise responsibility as we use the gifts you grant us in your world. Amen. – Adapted from *The Mennonite Hymnal* (1969) #749

Sermon overview

Sermon thesis: God uses people to accomplish the mission of the Kingdom in the world, even though God's followers are imperfect and exist within an imperfect empire.

As you review the following sermon outline and scripture texts, we offer these comments to guide your preparation. Not all topics and subpoints below may fit your context. The overall theme is to acknowledge the tension we find in Joseph's story as it relates to being both a steward of God as well as working within an imperfect political system for Pharaoh. We include Exodus 1:5-14, which tells the rest of the story. Even though Joseph did all the good he could, it didn't turn out well for the descendants of Jacob. But later, along came Moses.

We build connections in the application section between the amazing story of Joseph and other historic models and faithful stewards living in challenging situations. We hope this serves you well and can advance the conversation in your congregation about being God's faithful stewards in our imperfect workplace and world.

Joseph: Pharaoh's Steward; God's Steward

Scripture selections: Genesis 41: 33-46; Exodus 1: 5-14; Acts 4:32-37

I. Introduction

The story of Joseph has multiple layers and takes on as many shades and colors as that famous coat he received as a young man. Today, we want to consider the theme of Joseph as steward. How did he manage the situations that came his way – both good and bad – and allow God to use him? How did he manage the tensions between serving the Kingdom God and Pharaoh's empire?

Joseph tried to be faithful even when life was out of his control. It was his faith in God that guided his responses. One definition of stewardship is, *it's everything you do after you say, "I believe."* It's about organizing our lives in such a way that God can do the most with us. This definition does not limit our stewardship conversation to money or financial generosity. It encourages us to open ourselves to the leading of the spirit in every aspect of our lives. How did Joseph use his circumstances and opportunities to fulfill his mission and purpose? And what does it offer to us in our own journey?

- A. Key events in Joseph's life: circumstances shape who we are and what we are called to do.
 - Joseph's pathway to power:
 - Living in Canaan.
 - Sold into slavery.

- Purchased by Potiphar.
- Imprisoned.
- Pulled from prison and promoted to head of Pharaoh’s household.

II. Steward for God and Pharaoh

A. Joseph as Pharaoh’s Steward:

- Pharaoh saw great potential and wisdom in Joseph, and frees him from prison.
- Joseph struggles to live in both the world of Pharaoh and the faith tradition of his people.
- What were challenges Joseph faced working with Pharaoh and a pagan empire?

B. Joseph as God’s Steward:

- Joseph’s position helped save the lives of Egyptians and his own family.
- God positioned Joseph for this role and gave him the gifts needed for success.
- How well did Joseph balance serving God and working for Pharaoh?
- Was Joseph faithful to God’s calling?

C. The story of God’s people continues.... Exodus 1:5-14

- The next Pharaoh enslaves the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.
- Was Joseph taken advantage of and was the enslavement of his people his fault?
- How does the full story of Joseph relate to our lives today as servants and stewards?
- Was Joseph complicit with Pharaoh and the enslavement of his people?

III. What is the message and application for the church?

A. 1st century application (Read Acts 4:32- 37)

- Another Joseph (Barnabas) participates in overcoming an imperfect system.
- The early church shares with one another as any have need to bring relief to their people.
- The use of a common purse was the church’s response to the economic system of the day.

B. 18th Century application (Earn-Save-Give)

- John Wesley wrote in 1786 in *Thoughts upon Methodism*: “... What way, then, (I ask again) can we take, that our money may not sink us to the

nethermost hell? There is one way, and there is no other under heaven. If those who 'gain all they can,' and 'save all they can,' will likewise 'give all they can;' then, the more they gain, the more they will grow in grace, and the more treasure they will lay up in heaven."

- Wesley believed that the church was called to serve the poor, and modeled his life accordingly. As his income increased with royalties from books, hymn writing and speaking engagements, he kept his lifestyle in check and gave away all that was above his needs.
- Wesley challenged those of his day to consider the needs of the poor as a Christian response to an unjust system.

C. 21st Century application: Shane Claiborne and The Simple Way community in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Shane lives in an intentional community in North Philadelphia called The Simple Way. When they run into systems that throw obstacles in their neighbors' way, they advocate for systemic change together. Ultimately, they envision all of their neighbors coming to a place of security that enables growth and flourishing.

Quotes from a 2009 interview with Shane:

- "I really wanted to learn how to love my neighbor as myself and to follow Jesus, not just believe in him. And not just to worship Jesus but to do the things that he did. ...[Jesus said] if you want to be the greatest, become the least ... is this American dream really the dream of God?"
- "Even though I live in the poorest district in Pennsylvania, it is also one where I feel like community just naturally flourishes because of how people have had to survive together."
- "We read the book of Acts ... there was a moment when we really said, 'Let's stop complaining about the church that we have experienced and let's work on becoming the church that we dream of.' We set ourselves to try to become a community that lives a lot like the early church in Acts ... We have a common life together; we wake up together for morning prayer, and we do activities in the neighborhood..."
- "Just as much as we are called to radical discipleship, we are also called to community. There is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian out there."
- "In the early church, it says the offerings were put at the apostles' feet and they were redistributed to people as they had needs. There was this radical economy of sharing, where people were committed to bearing each other's burdens and sharing the needs of the community together."

IV. Conclusion

Joseph son of Jacob (Genesis 41) and Joseph, also known as Barnabas, (Acts 4) lived and served in imperfect systems. They each were given gifts, opportunities and resources to use to serve others. John Wesley and Shane Claiborne have their own stories, as do we. As imperfect as our situations may be, we are all called to do our part in bringing in God's Kingdom. It is possible to serve God and work alongside Pharaoh, knowing that sometimes our best efforts may lead to future disappointments, as we read about in Exodus 1. But don't lose heart, remain faithful, because God has yet to write the final chapter.

In all of these stories, we see God's people serving within communities alongside their brothers and sisters. We see them developing a plan and moving forward with intentionality. God calls on us to be channels of his love at home, at work and in the world, serving and sharing with others as we are able. To be stewards of God's grace.

Benediction:

Leave here today as models of the life of Jesus, not only as believers in him. May you find ways to do God's will in imperfect situations, share each other's burdens, and be good stewards of all resources and of God's grace as we all work together to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth. Go in peace.



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