

LIVING IN PHARAOH'S HOUSE
[written in oral form]

Genesis 45:1-15
Proper 15, Year A

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Joseph is a significant character in Genesis.
The 16 chapter narrative is rich with many layers of lessons.

In today's portion, Joseph becomes a saviour figure, and this role is rarely examined.

But first, some background information to refresh your memory.

Young Joseph was favoured by his father Jacob, and he knew it.
His brothers greatly resented Joseph, and sold him to a group heading to Egypt. Although a slave,
Joseph was eventually able to impress the Pharaoh.

The Pharaoh put him in control of all of Egypt. In chapter 44, it states that he was like the Pharaoh himself.
Moreover, he controlled all the storage of surplus grain. Joseph had interpreted Pharaoh's dream that predicted 7 years of bountiful harvest, and then 7 years of drought.
Joseph had stored large amount of the bounty, and then the drought came.

The famine struck everyone, even those in the land of milk and honey.
Back in Canaan, the Hebrews were struggling to survive, so Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy food.
Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.
So, Joseph played a number of cruel tricks on them.
Maybe it was a bit of revenge. ??
Regardless, it is abusive when the powerful take advantage of the vulnerable.

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Nevertheless, Joseph was in Pharaoh's house. He could do as he liked.

Pharaoh's house is the place of power, affluence and entitlement, and it is usually trimmed with greed, arrogance and exploitation.

It is easy to forget past hardships when in Pharaoh's house.

It is easy to forget a past of being persecuted, abused or oppressed when in Pharaoh's House.

When in Pharaoh's House, it is easy to **not** notice injustices, such as a biased judicial system, police prejudice and abuse.... and economic penalties on the poor.

It is comfortable in Pharaoh's House.

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Joseph was in Pharaoh's house, and in today's text, he stops vindictively distressing his brothers.
He tells them who he is, butthey did not recognize him.
He looked like Egyptian royalty.

Joseph acted like authoritative royalty. He did not appear as a brother. His own family could not recognize him.

He had to tell them twice-- "Hey, I really am your brother Joseph!"

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When he recounts his past, he did not mention being sold as a slave.

This is a sign that he forgave them,.... but it is easy to forgive when things turn out well.

Of course, Joseph credits God for all his success and wealth, but...that projection leaves the distaste of prosperity theology.

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Then, Joseph tells his brothers to return to Jacob and to bring him and the entire Hebrew clan back to Egypt.

Verse 7 states that Joseph "Preserves the 'Remnant'." Remnant is almost a sacred word.

Joseph preserves -- he SAVES the Hebrews.

This is Joseph as a saviour.

The rich and powerful leader, Joseph, is saving the weak and desperate.

How typical, we humans tend to look to the powerful and wealthy to bring salvation. We apparently assume that only they can help.

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As our world struggles, the media turns to such people for hope and rescue.

Consider the attention given to billionaires Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, even Mark Zuckerberg.

Part of Donald Trump's appeal was his self-polished-image of being rich and powerful.

Maybe I should toss in a few religious leaders, too?

There's Franklin Graham. he worth 25 million.

Pat Robertson is worth 100 million, and of course the outlandish Kenneth Copeland, who claims 750 million.

They All live in Pharaoh's house.

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What is our model / our vision for a saviour?

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Joseph did not even look like his brothers, and he sure did **not** look and act like Jesus.

The wealthy and powerful bringing salvation is NOT the way of Christ.

Money and power does

Not bring salvation.

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Joseph sent lots of wagons and oxen to move all the Hebrews and their belongings.

When they arrived in Egypt, Joseph's clan was given the finest land,.. the very best land to cultivate and live on.  
And,.... they accepted it.

Does that Ring a bell?  
That wonderful land was NOT sitting vacant and unused!

This reminds us of our settler history.....and our Mennonite history.  
And,.... they accepted it.  
They accepted the expulsion of the original owners.

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The famine continued for five more years. People from all over were forced to buy their food from Joseph.
Soon they were out of money, so Joseph took their livestock in exchange for grain. That was their future source of income.
They next year, the desperate came pleading: "We are out of food, and all we have is ourselves and our land."
So, Joseph took their land which was their hope for the future.
And finally, he took them.
The poor and hungry were forced to be his slaves.
He enslaved the countless people, except his relatives.

His clan was living in Pharaoh's house now, and they smiled,... and they financially prospered.

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There are consequences to living in Pharaoh's house, such as losing touch with mercy, grace, justice and God's way.

Living in Pharaoh's house is isolating. One becomes dull to the plight and struggles of the weak and powerless.

The injustices of minorities being disproportionately carded, abused, incarcerated and killed.... moves by as if distant clouds.

People in Pharaoh's house had to learn about "Black lives matter."  
They had to be confronted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And, for many it felt like a slap in the face.

In Pharaoh's house privilege is rarely identified. It is assumed that those outside simply need to work harder..and deserve their lot in life.

In Pharaoh's house, one does not see how the system favours the affluent, the powerful.

For example, the US and Canadian border is closed except for essential reasons,.....that is if you are driving a vehicle.

It is very easy to fly back and forth. Do you wonder why that is?

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Affluent people, business people can afford to fly. Is this exception an oversight, or an assumption that they are wiser and more important. Is it assumed that they would be more careful and prudent.

That is a view.....from Pharaoh's house.

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To be sure, most people living in Pharaoh's house are kind and generous,.... generous with their surplus. They do help the poor and needy.

Yet, the unjust system that causes the poor and needy remains.

Just like Joseph, those in Pharaoh's house take care of their own.

They grant assistance to their young so that they will remain in Pharaoh's house.

Yet,.....there is a problem, but before I get to that, Please do not think this is a condemnation on being affluent.

**It is** a revelation on how wealth affects people and how the wealthy affect others.

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The problem is, as it was with Joseph in Pharaoh's house, is this: are people of faith recognized?

Or, do they/we resemble all the others in Pharaoh's house?

Do outside people declare, "Ah,.... I can see you believe and trust in God."

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Are we recognized as people living God's way?

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Moreover, and here is the kicker:

The book of Exodus begins after the death of Joseph.

Verse 8 of Chapter one, "Now a new king arose over Egypt, Who did NOT know Joseph.

Continuing, The new king said to his people, "Look the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them."

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This is why the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. They used their power to abuse others and for personal gain.

The reason they became slaves is often overlooked and forgotten, by all, by everyone when pondering life while living in Pharaoh's house.

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I do not think we have to fear enslavement.

Yet, I do wonder if we have put Christ in Pharaoh's House. ??

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Do people recognize Christ in the church?

Is grace, peace and God's way of social justice clearly identified in us?

Do people recognize Christ? We the church are the body of Christ.

Do they look to the church for hope and for a saviour?

Or,.....are rich tycoons and the government the vision of a saviour?  
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What have we done?