

to me? God be gracious to you, my son!” With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, “Serve the meal.” (vv.29-31)

What a heavenly banquet! Surely this is one of the most moving and deeply human stories in the Bible. It makes me weep to read it. And I think of others who have been “put away” unjustly for a long time—like Nelson Mandela—others who, like Joseph, never let the dream die inside of them. Here he is, after all these years, reunited with all of his brothers and assured by them of his father’s well-being. The miracle of reconciliation is happening; let us rejoice and celebrate!

Psalms 75, 76; 1 Corinthians 7:10-24; Mark 5:1-20

by Betty Carr Pulkingham

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Sunday, February 28

Genesis 41:14-45 *Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “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.” (vv.14–15 NRSV)*

Life is full of surprises. And we just never know when God is going to call us forth for some purpose. It was true for Joseph, and it is true for us. It will likely be when we are least expecting it—as Joseph must have been, put away in that dungeon. But he had done his homework—which is to say, he had been faithful in relationship to the God whom he served. He had not spent his time in that dungeon consumed in bitterness because of the unfair treatment he had received at the hand of his brothers, as well as the ungrateful cup-bearer whose life he had saved (see the preceding chapter). So, he was ready. He was ready to step forth when God called him forth. Are we?

Psalms 24, 29; Romans 6:3-14; John 5:19-24

Monday, March 1

Genesis 41:46–57 *Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” The second he named Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.” (vv.51–52)*

Have you ever lived in a place you would characterize as the land of your misfortunes? I suppose most of us have, at one time or another. It happened to me in the early 1990’s when my husband died quite suddenly while we were in a period of transition. Fortunately for me, we were on an Easter visit to my elderly mom and aunt—both of them nonagenarians. So I was in my hometown, though I had not lived there for over forty years and it hardly felt like home anymore. Still, there I was. And there I stayed—because the Lord showed me I was needed in that place, at that time. For the next ten years I was an eldercare-giver, something I had never dreamed of being, or doing. It was the Lord’s time, and it was the Lord’s doing. And he made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.

Psalms 56, 57, 58; 1 Corinthians 4:8-21; Mark 3:7-19a

Tuesday, March 2

Genesis 42:1–17 *Here is how you shall be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies.” And he put them all together in prison for three days. (vv.15–17)*

Do you have a friend or relative who has been wrongly accused or misunderstood, even mistreated and persecuted? If anyone had reason for paranoia, surely it was Joseph. I can't imagine what inner struggles he must have had, sorting all of this through, determining how to treat his brothers in his current position as governor, while remembering the past and being in touch with his own inner feelings as well. He *needed* those three days to ponder the matter. We need time for reflection also, when we are pondering a course of action in an emotionally charged situation.

Psalms 61, 62; 1 Corinthians 5:1-8; Mark 3:19b-35

Wednesday, March 3

Genesis 42:18–28 *Joseph then gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. This was done for them. (v.25)*

There are times on life's journey when things seem crazy, when things are happening at a dizzying speed around us—some of it good, some of it bad. I'm sure it was hard for Joseph's brothers to grasp being in prison one day and given generous provisions for their journey on the next day! It's hard to know what to make of all that. My friend Daphne Grimes' husband died just a week before her long-awaited ordination to the priesthood. What an emotional mix! How did she cope, I have often wondered. But she did. She even celebrated Communion at his funeral. Her message for me (through her manifest behavior) was that when life throws unexpected things our way, God is right there in the midst of it all. We can “keep in the middle of the road,” as the spiritual has it. We can put one foot in front of the other and keep on walking.

Psalms 72; 1 Corinthians 5:9—6:8; Mark 4:1-20

Thursday, March 4

Genesis 42:29–38 *And their father Jacob said to them, “I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!” (v.36)*

“It's too much, Lord! *I can't stand it!*” After more than a decade of ministry overseas then a period of re-connection back in the States, after seeing one after another of our children “peel off” to pursue their own

educational goals and life-directions, leaving only the younger two—after all of that, now this. My husband Graham is on the phone from Florida, our youngest son David is there with him. They are asking my assent for David to remain in Florida with a priest/friend of our family, Ran Chase, so that he can finish his high school education in the USA rather than be shuttled back to England for a short-term stay. David already has his overseas ticket (we are scheduled to meet them in England) and they are all but on their way to the airport when this thunderbolt idea strikes. “And now you would take *David!*” my heart cried out. The amazing thing is: it turned out to be a wonderful God-given opportunity for David. But I could never have released him that day except for the *very present* help of family and community members. They helped me listen for God in the mix, and discern His will.

Psalms 70, 71; 1 Corinthians 6:12-30; Mark 4:21-34

Friday, March 5

Genesis 43:1–15 *“If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry them down as a present to the man... Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, so that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” (vv.11a, 13-14)*

My heart aches for Jacob in this story. How much can an old man be called upon to bear? He has already lost Rachel's son Joseph; now he is asked to give over Benjamin, the last remaining son of his beloved Rachel. Maybe he too will be lost and gone forever (that is bound to have been Jacob's fear). When our children live in faraway places, when accident or illness befalls them, we feel vulnerable; we long to be closer, or for them to be closer. But to send one of them away as a supposed ransom for food supplies: such a concept is beyond me. Besides (laugh if you will) there were no cell-phones, no ways to keep in touch! How different life is now than in Jacob's day. But...it is his truly graceful response that leaves me in awe. In the end, Jacob doesn't send Benjamin grudgingly. He *turns*, does an about-face, to *bless* this unknown stranger whom he refers to as “the man.”

Lord, teach me in life's hard places not to begrudge the outcome or simply to acquiesce, but to say with Jacob, “If it must be so, then (I will) do this.” Teach us how to turn and bless those who threaten us most.

Psalms 69; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9; Mark 4:35-41

Saturday, March 6

Genesis 43:16–34 *Then he looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, “Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke*