

Sunday 17th July 2022 (Evensong)
Be Prepared
Genesis 41:1-16, 25-37

A sermon preached by Revd Catherine Vaughan at St. Michael & All Angels Church, Sandhurst

Joseph -Dad's favourite

- Given an ornate robe
- Had significant dreams
- Sold by his brothers to Midianite merchants
- Taken off to Egypt
- Sold to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials
- Joseph did a good job and rose to being in charge of Potiphar's household
- Got put in prison after false allegations from Potiphar's wife
- Earned respect in prison especially when he correctly interpreted dreams of the chief baker and the chief cup bearer

On this particular night, Pharaoh had these 2 dreams; one of 7 fat cows and 7 thin cows, one of 7 ripe, lush ears of corn and 7 weather beaten and thin ears of corn.

When he awoke in the morning "his spirit was troubled"

Have you ever had that feeling, when something is niggling you, you don't always know why or what it is, but you just have this niggling feeling about something that won't go away.

What do you do about it? What do you do with that 'troubled spirit' ?

Do we push it down and distract ourselves with something else in the hope that it goes away?

Or do we try to deal with it in the way that seems the first likely solution?

Or do we turn to God in prayer and see what He leads us to?

I think that this part of Joseph's story has a lot to teach us because often important opportunities come to us when we least expect them and sometimes when they are not obvious.

Joseph was still in prison. He had interpreted 2 very important dreams; one for the chief baker which ended in him being hanged, and the other for the chief cupbearer who was restored to his former position.

2 years passed and all that he had done for the cupbearer seemed to have been forgotten.

Joseph must have been wondering what was going to happen, how long was he going to have to stay in this prison.

When unexpectedly and out of the blue, Joseph was summoned in to the presence of Pharaoh.

We may have seen recently when people have been summoned to visit our Queen but those have been celebratory occasions to receive a Knighthood or other honour.

With Joseph this was not likely to be the case

The name Pharaoh was a boast, a boast that he was a leader of a great house of kings

Joseph was being summoned to the palace, a building designed to make visitors feel intimidated and afraid.

A place where Egyptians trembled and grovelled, where Hebrew slaves were not granted access and where criminals received their death sentence.

Joseph was summoned and quickly brought from his dungeon into the palace of one of the most arrogantly powerful men in the world.

I wonder what would have been going through your mind in that situation.

Joseph seems to have been very calm and astute.

Pharaoh did not beat about the bush. He came straight out with his expectation of Joseph to interpret a dream that Pharaoh had had.

It is important to note the response that Joseph gave.

Pharaoh said "I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it" vs 15

Joseph immediately replied 'It is not me; God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace' vs 16

Despite all his years in prison, Joseph had stayed close to God, he had continued to pray to Him and be open to Him and so without hesitation he pointed Pharaoh to God's knowledge, not his own ability.

It was Joseph's knowledge of God and not his knowledge of dreams. that helped him and enabled him to interpret Pharaoh's dream.

Despite the potentially overwhelming circumstances, Joseph stood with his head held high and spoke up for God.

He had learned to view the world with God's perspective.

He set YHWH apart as Lord

He had the antidote for Pharaoh's crown and opulence and remembered that at the end of the day, Pharaoh was simply another man, not God.

Joseph was prepared for the summons to Pharaoh even when it came at very short notice.

Important opportunities come to us, often when we least expect them.

After Pharaoh had told Joseph of what he had seen in his dreams, Joseph wasted no time in explaining the meaning of them.

That there would be 7 years of abundance followed by 7 years of famine and that a good way to deal with this would be to appoint a man who was discreet and wise and who would appoint a good team to work with him. And their strategy should be to store up a proportion of the harvest each year for the first 7 years to see them through the following 7 years.

Throughout his interpretation Joseph continually gave credit to God and pointed Pharaoh towards God. Joseph was humble about himself but unflinchingly confident in God's word. Joseph spoke with God's authority.

Don't underestimate this.

Pharaoh thought of himself as a god, as the one with ultimate authority. Joseph's repeated reference to God could have been enough to have been flung back in to his dungeon or worse!

Joseph walked closely with God and was immediately able to call on Him to help interpret the dreams. He also drew on His wisdom to come up with a 14 year plan which in effect prevented Egypt's impending ruin. Joseph helped to put God's plan into action. And was clear that it was His plan, not Joseph's

Are we ready and prepared to do the same?

We may not be called to go before our Queen and speak out a Godly inspired plan... although given our current political situation, don't block that out!! :-)

But we will all be called to do something.

God delights in using us, His church, to be His hands and feet and mouthpieces here on earth in order to bring about His plans.

Important opportunities may come when we least expect them. Are we prepared? And do we remember to give God the credit.

Let me just leave you with a true story.

Several years ago when I had not long moved to Bath, our church staff team had to do some first aid training. A member of the congregation who was the senior nurse for a local private school, came and delivered the training over the course of a couple of days. I became stunned and excited... not by the actual first aid, much of which I had learned before in different settings, but by the endless stream of examples that she gave us, no matter which aspect of first aid she was teaching us.

Sarah lived in the school, she was on call several nights a week and on a daily basis she was dealing with all sorts of things that come from looking after a large number of teenagers resident in school. She was also a regular on the side lines of various sporting events, particularly rugby, where she had to put her first aid in to practice.

But she also, every day off, would pray before she set foot outside her door, to be prepared for God to use her that day, however He chose.

She was able to give real life examples of so many times where she had been the only first aider on site, more often than not on her day off, and where she had made a significant difference in the lives of people, often saving precious lives.

Sarah walked closely with God, she prayed and was open to being used by Him

Important opportunities regularly came her way. She was prepared. And she gave the glory and the credit to God.

May we be like Joseph and like Sarah and remember that 'It is not I, but God!'

Amen.