

- I. Today we begin our series on resilience, which psychology defines as the “process of adapting well in the face of adversity.”
  - A. The last six months has had a lot of adversity, and this on top of the ongoing adversity that each of us faces individually as we work to become more loving people in the face of hellish influences telling us to put ourselves first
  - B. A common way to think about resilience is the ability to grit our way through hard times, and sometimes that is what is involved
  - C. Yet a lot of modern research in psychology takes a different view, one that focuses less on being tough minded than it does on being pliable and able to find constructive approaches to the challenges we face
  - D. This aligns much more closely with what the Lord teaches about spiritual living. Yes, there are many times when we grit it out, forcing ourselves to do what is right in the face of strong temptation to do the opposite.
  - E. Yet the goal of spiritual life is to become increasingly aware of the Lord’s presence within every situation, and to see and experience that bringing Him and His love and wisdom into our lives changes how we see those struggles
- II. We’ll be exploring resilience in the light of the Joseph story
  - A. Joseph faced a pretty amazing amount of adversity – hate and betrayal from many people, despite his having done nothing wrong
  - B. Yet he appears to have chosen a resilient path, one that included not only doing what was right in difficult situations, but far more importantly turning to the Lord for hope, direction and sustainment during the whole process
  - C. This dynamic, living awareness of the Lord is at the heart of resilience
- III. Each week we will explore part of the Joseph story in conjunction with one resilience practice that aligns with the message of the story. Today’s resilience practice is mindfulness, or paying attention
  - A. Mindfulness as it is taught in popular culture is about being aware of what is actually happening rather than going through life mindlessly
  - B. When you wash the dishes, wash the dishes. Don’t have earphones in, chatter about the weather, worry about the election, or pop from one thought to the other so that you scarcely know what you thought or what you did. Be present to washing the dishes. Notice the smooth glide of soapy water and cloth over the dishes, the warmth of the water. Wash the dishes
  - C. The practice of consciously breathing, noticing each in breath and each out breath is a common way to bring us back to awareness
- IV. Spiritually speaking we thrive or falter depending on what we pay attention to
  - A. Our reading today spoke about being mindful of the Lord, and having that awareness in the back of our consciousness even when doing other things
  - B. We do this with all things important to us. A person truly committed to his or her marriage always has some level of awareness of being married, while someone who is not married and interested in being so has an awareness of being available. That awareness affects everything they do, and it is palpable

- C. It is the same with all that we do. Spiritual living is about learning to pay attention to the right things, and to do them so much that we embody them
- V. For today, though, we're focusing on awareness, on noticing, on attention
  - A. Something striking in the story we just read is that both dramatically good and dramatically bad things are presented, both great hope and the kind of selfishness that leads to despair
  - B. Part of being a healthy spiritual person is to be aware of both sides of our character.
  - C. The Psalmist wrote: "My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:26)
    - 1. There's failure and selfishness, and also lifting up and hope in the Lord
    - 2. We can at times notice only the selfishness in us, only the failure and ugliness. That by itself without hope just leads to ugly despair
    - 3. And at other times we might be unaware of the negative, and over-focus on our good intentions or our hopes for a grand future
    - 4. When we are mindful we notice both, and this is particularly true during trials or temptations, when the underlying character of evils is brought out
    - 5. When we see truly we can make progress
- VI. In our story Joseph stands for the inner part of us, the part that is open and receptive to the Lord and trying to live a spiritual life
  - A. The brothers stand for our lower self. Often this lower self is a good and useful part of us, but in this story we are being shown the times when our outer self is acting in opposition to our inner self
  - B. The beginning of spiritual life involves noticing both
  - C. In the days of creation in Genesis, day two involves the separation of the waters above the earth from the waters under the earth – sky from sea. This is a vital step in our lives at each stage of development. We start out in one big morass as we face a challenge, just like the creation story begins by saying that "the earth was without form and void."
    - 1. Then we start to make distinctions, and one of the first is the distinction between what is higher from what is lower, what is from the Lord and what is from self, what is lasting and what is temporary
    - 2. At this stage we may not *do* a lot about that awareness, but we are building an awareness, a mindfulness, of what's going on inside us, just like our story shows Joseph and his brothers acting so differently
- VII. Something you'll notice in this story is the strength of the negative emotions the brothers feel – hate, contempt, murderous desire, envy
  - A. I suspect that most negative emotions we experience, and most of our selfish behaviors, don't tend towards such extreme emotions, at least consciously
  - B. Part of what the Word does is present the underlying emotions and motives in their more stark form, both good and bad
    - 1. That's because these emotions, from heaven or hell, are the deepest motivations that in point of fact drive us
    - 2. Destructive anger, if you dig deep enough, has a spark of hate, and yes,

even murder, within it (AC 4750:5)

3. One of the ways we can inspire ourselves to change is to dig deep enough into our negative behaviors to see the truly ugliness that lies within them
  - a. It's not just a bit of friendly conversation; it's gossip, and in point of fact it's character assassination that I'm taking delight in
  - b. It's not just feeling sorry for myself; it's self absorption that puts my needs above all others around me and ignores their needs
4. This is what we see on the negative side of this story
- C. And on the positive side we see Joseph, who is the most Christ-like figure in the Old Testament. He responds with unearthly calm and trust in the Lord in a host of situations that would try us
  1. Part of being mindful is to notice the good – the part that wants to turn to the Lord and trust in Him
  2. Joseph embodies the Lord's teaching in Matthew: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things." (Matt 6:33-34)
  3. In fact, Joseph specifically stands for the Divine truth from the Lord's Divine Human (AC 4669)
    - a. That means that Joseph in us is the part that looks to the Lord as a Divinely Human God and asks what truth He wants us to live
- D. When we see negative things we can sometimes see only the negative.
  1. Something that is important to consider is that only the good in us sees what is negative. Your selfish parts are not even slightly interested in noticing and feeling upset with your flaws
  2. So the very act of noticing is a sign of a deeper part of us (AC 1953)
- VIII. Turning to our story, we begin with Joseph bringing a bad report about some of his brothers
  - A. Our inner self notices and is mindful when we see our outer self behaving poorly. Where do you care enough to notice if you don't do it well?
  - B. Joseph in us is moved by certain spiritual desires and notice when we fail
- IX. Joseph is also beloved by Israel and given a special coat, something that makes his brothers so jealous and angry that they can't speak peaceably to him
  - A. Parents playing favorites is not a good thing, but the symbolism of this story is about something good
  - B. Joseph is the part of us willing to turn to the Lord, to be humble before Him
  - C. It is the beloved; it is the spiritual heir
  - D. Our desire to change, and our willingness to change is the beloved son
  - E. We can notice when we want change, and when we are humble enough to change, especially due to what the Lord says. This is the hope for our future
- X. And in the dreams Joseph has we see the inner call for the Lord in our deeper self being offered great promise, and the lower part that not only doesn't want any of it but responds with hate

- A. Bowing down to inner guidance from the Lord looks like slavery it it
- XI. And we see this hate and contempt personified in the way they treat Joseph when he comes to visit them.
  - A. His father tells him, “Go and see the peace of your brothers and the peace of the flock.” That’s what Joseph is us looks for – peace & the Lord’s presence
  - B. They plan to kill him then downgrade to merely selling him and telling their father that he is dead.
  - C. A horrible response, and it is in the Word because it is in us too, and seeing them can reenforce or will to do what is right
- XII. We are called this week, then, to be mindful, to observe the waters above the firmament in us and the waters below
  - A. What is Joseph in you?
    1. What affections draw you toward heaven?
    2. What activities are you choosing now that reflect a desire to turn to the Lord and to love others?
    3. What truth are you willing to stand for in your own life even if it is inconvenient or unpopular?
    4. In what way are you looking toward peace in what you do?
    5. In what way are you turning toward the visible God?
  - B. And how might the brothers be showing up?
    1. Can you see some ugliness that is perhaps frightening?
    2. Can you see motives lurking under the surface of actions that make you cringe?
    3. The path toward peace involves seeing them for what they are
    4. The very capacity to see them involves stepping up to the inner part of yourself (AC 1953)
    5. And the reaction in you that cringes or feels pain is Joseph in you being saddened
- XIII. And in the very act of being mindful we activate Joseph in us.
  - A. We read: “nothing can look into itself; but it must be something more internal or higher that thinks about it, for this can look into it” (AC 1953).
    1. Only what is higher can look at what is lower
      - a. Our rational mind looks down at our sensory mind and can have perspective
      - b. At a moral and spiritual level it is our inner self, here depicted by Joseph, who is mindful and aware of what is going on
      - c. That awareness comes from the Lord’s life and light flowing into us
      - d. And true looking requires humility and a desire to do what is right
- XIV. Today we start a series, so we’re not taking it too far
  - A. Yet it is also good to keep in mind that true mindfulness is not just observing the good and the bad
  - B. It is turning to the Lord as the one God, and being mindful of what He wants you to do
  - C. For much of his story Joseph appears like a pawn, impacted by the malice of

others. And our lives can at times feel like that

- D. Yet Joseph's quiet willingness to turn to the Lord, to refuse bitterness, to do his best come what may, to give credit to the Lord for all things he can do, is the quiet influence that changes our world
- E. The more you hold onto that, as our reading said, the more it becomes an unseen stream, affecting you even when you are not paying attention
- F. Today we pay attention to good and bad, but with the hope that our awareness and will for good can become so strong that the presence and peace from the Lord drives out all other motives
- G. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

Gen 37 Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf."

And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me."

So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind....

[Joseph went to see how his brothers were doing.] Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"

But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.

And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh." And his brothers listened. Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?"

So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, "We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?"

And he recognized it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces." Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.

AC 5130 Anyone who receives and possesses faith is constantly mindful of the Lord. This is so even when he is thinking or talking about something other than Him, or else when he is carrying out his public, private, or family duties, though he is not directly conscious of his mindfulness of the Lord while he is carrying them out. Indeed that mindfulness of the Lord present in those who possess faith governs their whole being, but that which governs their whole being is not noticed by them except when they turn their thought specifically to that matter.

...One who is governed by some love, whatever this may be, is thinking constantly about things connected with that love. This is so even when other matters occupy his mind, conversation, or action. This is quite evident in the next life from the spiritual spheres which surround everyone individually.... For that which governs a person's whole being produces the sphere surrounding him and reveals to others what his life is. From this one may see what is meant by the statement that one ought to be thinking constantly about the Lord, salvation, and life after death. All who possess faith that is grounded in charity do so, as a consequence of which they do not entertain evil thoughts regarding their neighbor, and that which is just and fair is present in every aspect of their thought, speech, and action; for that which governs the person's whole being enters every particular aspect of it, both leading it and controlling it. Indeed the Lord holds the mind to those concerns that are charitable and are therefore matters of faith, and in so doing He fits every single thing in the mind into its proper place. The sphere of faith grounded in charity is the sphere which reigns in heaven, for the Lord flows in with love, and by means of love with charity, and as a consequence with truths which are the truths of faith. This explains why those in heaven are said to be in the Lord.