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PITS

we've all been there

An Order of Worship for the Home

October 11, 2020

The Pits – week 3 – Joseph

This service is written for two speakers. Ideally, family members can speak and declare God's grace to one another following this format. For those who live alone, this worship outline can be followed with a brother or sister in Christ over the phone. You may call on a friend to fill this role, or your elder or pastor can worship with you by phone.

There is an "offering prayer" included in this outline. As we shelter in place, please continue to worship through giving. You can mail offering envelopes and checks to Calvary or visit www.calvaryslz.org to give online.

Invocation

Reader 1: We gather to worship. We gather to pray.
Reader 2: We gather to our God and to his word.
Reader 1: We gather in the name of our God who is...
Reader 2: Father, Son and Holy Spirit...
Together: Amen.

Psalm 88:1-7

¹ O Lord, God of my salvation,
I cry out day and night before you.

² Let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry!

³ For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.

⁴ I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am a man who has no strength,

⁵ like one set loose among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.

⁶ You have put me in the depths of the pit,
in the regions dark and deep.

⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

Confession & Absolution

Make sure each person present has opportunity to confess to a brother or sister in faith. Go through both parts as many times as needed to accommodate all who are gathered.

Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. (Isaiah 38:17)

Christian Confessing: My disobedience is a pit which I have fallen into. My loss of hope is a pit from which I cannot escape. I want to be forgiven. I want to have a stronger faith. God, redeem my life from the pit.

Christian Responding: Your God knows the pitfalls of your life. Not only that, he sent his Son to the pit of death in order to rescue you. In Christ you are forgiven! By his new life, you have new life as well. He is the God who redeems your life from the pit.

Together: Amen.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,*

*who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit...
(Psalm 103:2-4a)*

John 9:1-7

¹ As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Genesis 37:12-24

¹² Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am."¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. ¹⁵ And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?"¹⁶ "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." ¹⁷ And the man said, "They have

gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. ^[b] Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.” ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” ²² And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Message

Pits and God’s Purpose

So far we’ve looked at two stories in this series. Daniel was thrown into a pit with lion’s because the people in power had it in for him. Jeremiah was imprisoned in a pit for his obedience speaking God’s messages to Judah’s king. We’ve got another story to look at today – another pit.

You already heard the reading from Genesis, so you know who this is about. Today we’ll consider Joseph’s story. His own brothers threw him into a pit. That event set Joseph’s life on an unexpected trajectory which would serve God’s purposes despite more than one “pit” along the way.

First, you need to know a little about the context of the reading we heard. Two generations earlier, God called Abraham and promised to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and to bless the world through his offspring. Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac fathered Jacob. God would change Jacob’s name to Israel, and his twelve sons would father the twelve tribes of Israel.

Israel was called to be a blessing to the world from the very start. The greatest blessing Israel would bring is Jesus, who was born from this family line as the Savior of all. That was God’s purpose for this family, and as we’ll see in Joseph’s story...

No pit will stop God’s purpose.

Joseph is one of the twelve sons of Israel. God had hinted at a purpose for Joseph's life through a couple dreams Joseph was given. In one, he and his brothers were gathering grain into bundles. The bundles stood up and all of his brothers' grain bowed down before his own. In another dream he saw the sun, moon, and eleven stars bow down before him. He shared these dreams with his brothers and father. Not surprisingly, they were not excited to hear about his visions.

I said the dreams hinted at God's purpose for Joseph, and that deserves some explanation. Joseph's purpose didn't come from these dreams. His purpose came from his identity as one loved and called by God. His purpose was actually no different from yours and mine.

You are loved by God too. You are called into his work in this world. Your purpose is to love God and love your neighbor. Your purpose is revealed as God sends you – as his presence – into the relationships you have with family members, and friends, and coworkers, and neighbors, and fellow students. Quite simply, your purpose is summarized in a calling to serve.

That was Joseph's purpose too. He served his father and his family by tending crops and herding sheep. In our reading today, he was serving his father by going to find news about his brothers.

Joseph's dreams didn't reveal much about the action of serving, but they pointed to something about the setting of that service. Our purpose always includes both action and setting. I think we sometimes long to know what purpose God has for our lives, but often we're really wondering about the setting. The action is always a form of serving others. The setting changes. With that in mind, let's move forward with Joseph's story.

Joseph's brothers weren't happy about the dreams Joseph shared with them. Add to this the fact that their father favored Joseph above the other sons. The twelve brothers had four different moms, and while Joseph was among the youngest, he was the firstborn of his father's favorite wife. His dad had made his preference for Joseph clear by gifting him a uniquely colorful robe.

If there was going to be a race for control of the family clan when their father eventually handed over leadership, Joseph had the inside track. His brothers might not have wanted Joseph to receive leadership in this family, but they really despised the thought that Joseph would make them bow to him. Instead of

waiting to see how this would play out, they decided to take matters into their own hands. They considered killing him, but one brother talked the group out of that. Instead, they throw him into a pit with no clear plan. But God has a plan, and it cannot be deterred by these events.

No pit will stop God's purpose.

Nobody imagines they'll end up in a pit. Nobody makes plans to get stuck in a pit. The pit is always unexpected. The pit always means life doesn't look like what you had in mind.

- Your pit might be the job you lost.
- Your pit might be the relationship you lost.
- Your pit might be the child you lost.
- Your pit might have to do with your health.
- Your pit might be the result of bad decisions on your part.
- Your pit might have come from what someone else did.
- Your pit might have to do with divorce, or prison, or pain, or mental illness.

No matter your pit. You need to hear this:

No pit will stop God's purpose.

Joseph's setting changed. He was sold to a caravan of traders. He was forced into slavery for an Egyptian official named Potiphar. It was a new setting, but the same action shaped his purpose. He would serve others.

In fact, Joseph served well. In Potiphar's house he showed an aptitude for leadership and administration. More than that, he proved himself trustworthy and honest.

The way forward for you and I is no different. We serve the people God places around us. We serve in whatever setting we find ourselves. You might call it making the best of a bad situation. It's not where you hoped to end up, and that can bring up questions about purpose. But, action and setting always overlap in our purpose. The action always involves serving, even as our setting changes.

If we get this right, does it result in "smooth sailing" from here on? There's no guarantee of that. Joseph was doing well. He was serving in his new setting. He was rewarded and promoted, but eventually he was accused of something he didn't do. Joseph was thrown into another pit. He was thrown into prison.

Yet, even in prison, Joseph continues serving. He once again proves himself trustworthy and capable. He's given some responsibilities because of the character he's displayed, and he gains a good reputation because he's faithful in his service.

If you read this part of Joseph's story you'll find out why he keeps serving. He knows he is loved by God. Joseph knows his identity as a child of God, and it's through this identity that he understands his purpose. When two fellow prisoners are troubled due to their dreams, Joseph immediately points to his God as the one who can help. Joseph is serving because it's the purpose he's been given by God. Joseph cares about the people around him because he knows his God cares for him – even in the pits.

No pit will stop God's purpose.

Eventually, Joseph is rescued from this pit. In a matter of hours, he goes from prisoner to Pharaoh's economic advisor. Of course, this is God at work. This is God working events toward *his* purpose. However, God's purpose isn't about making a comfortable life for Joseph. God's purpose is the promise he made to the family Joseph came from; the promise of a Savior for all people.

Joseph is moved into a powerful position in Egypt, and given insight by God concerning a coming famine, so that he can help Egypt plan for those years of famine. Joseph will prepare Egypt to sell food to surrounding countries during the famine. Egypt will have more-than-enough food. That proves crucial, because God's special family – the family through whom the whole world will be blessed – will be in desperate need. The family of Jacob will be in a pit of their own if they cannot find food. But through Joseph, God's plans and his purpose for Israel will continue.

No pit will stop God's purpose.

This gave hope to the family of Israel and his sons. This gives hope to you too. The same God who brought Joseph from the pit, knows the pits you encounter. The same God in whom Joseph found identity and purpose, gives these to you.

Your identity is this: You are a beloved child of your heavenly Father! You are worth more than anything to him! He has chosen you to be his own!

Now, he invites you into his work in this world. He's given you the same consistent purpose as Joseph. You were made to love God and love your

neighbor. You find purpose in serving. Your setting may change with each season, but your purpose always calls you to serve.

This is why the refrain of this sermon is more than a theological truth – it's a personal promise.

No pit will stop God's purpose *for you*.

God's purpose for Joseph played out as he served – in his family, in the house of Potiphar, in the jail, and finally in Pharaoh's court where he was in position to serve his own family again and preserve the line of the Messiah. Your purpose plays out as you serve too. Name a relationship in your life. _____ That's a place where your purpose shines through, because that's a neighbor you get to love. That's a place where you serve.

Even in the pits of 2020 this remains true. There have been plenty of pits to avoid this year. Some of you have done a pretty good job skirting the edges, but most of us have encountered a pit somewhere along the way – health issues, money issues, relationship issues, job issues, school issues, isolation and social issues...these are all pits. Yet, these are places where our purpose as God's children continues. We serve. The setting changes, but our call to serve does not.

No pit will stop God's purpose *for you*.

But let's be clear, God's purpose does not continue because you persevere. God's purpose doesn't gain traction because you work hard enough. His purpose doesn't succeed because you overcome. Rather, God's purpose for you will not stop because your God will not stop.

No pit will stop God's purpose for you, because your God is unstoppable. When Joseph's brothers trapped him in a pit, God supplied a way out. When Joseph was thrown in prison, his rescue came as God supplied interpretation for dreams. When the line of the Savior was threatened by famine, God provided Joseph in a powerful position in Egypt.

In fact, the line of the Messiah was preserved, and Jesus came as the promised Savior. As a result, in Jesus you can be confident of God's purpose for you. In Jesus your God has served you!

Jesus is God who became a human being. He entered the pit of this world. He suffered abuse, ridicule, and hardship. He was crucified, and went to the pit of death. If God's purpose for you was ever going to fail, that might have been the moment, but that's not what happened. Jesus rose from the dead. He really rose. His body came back to life, and he still lives. Because of that, you can be certain...

No pit will stop God's purpose *for you*.

Because Jesus lives, you have this new life too. You have this life of love for your God and for your neighbor. You have the life of Jesus, which is a life of serving. You have purpose because your God has called to to his side. You have purpose because God has chosen you for this, and he has empowered you.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

No pit will stop God's purpose *for you*.

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Share prayer requests with one another. Pray over the requests shared, then pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Offering Prayer

If you have an offering present as you worship, you may place your hands over it during the offering prayer.

Reader 1: With thankful hearts we receive from you, O Lord.
Reader 2: With thankful hearts we respond.
Reader 1: Receive our thanks and praise.
Reader 2: Receive our offerings.
Together: Receive us as your own.

Blessing (Jude v24-25)

Reader 1: Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,
Reader 2: to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Reader 1: be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority,
Reader 2: before all time and now and forever.
Together: Amen.

As applicable, please share this resource with others who would benefit. An electronic version is available at www.calvaryslz.org. We can also add friends to our mailing list if that is preferred.

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