

Text: Genesis 39:6b-12, 16-23

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, 7 and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" 8 But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. 9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. 11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. . . .She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." 19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. 20 Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21 the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. 23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Lead us not into temptation. . ." We know that God hears and answers prayer. But as long as we live on the face of this earth, we know that we will experience temptation. While God is not responsible for temptation and does not lead us into those temptations, there are enough other forces present in our lives to see to it that we have all the temptation we can handle . . . and maybe sometimes more!

If our job is in the field of finance, there may be an ongoing temptation to direct some of the money we handle toward ourselves. After all, who knows how to cook the books better than I do? That wouldn't be so hard! Or we may work day after day with a physically attractive co-worker. You know what they say, you spend more time at work than at home with your family! One thing can lead to another. And as if that were not enough, there is the constant temptation to put my pleasure and leisure at the top of my agenda and leave serving God with my life way at the bottom of that same list. There is no lack of temptation for any of us as we live them out here in a fallen world.

No one knew that better than Joseph. Of all the patriarch's of the Old Testament Joseph comes across to us as the one who always seemed to want to do the right thing. Even great men like Abraham, Moses and David are shown to us in the Bible with all of their moral warts. But Joseph – he seems to be the good guy. But talk about trying times! He had more than his share. And in the first lesson for today we see Joseph undergoing temptation that would buckle the knees of even the most Godly man alive.

Which brings us to a very important and intriguing question: How do I live my life the right way? How do I know what the right way is? How do I make sure that I make the right choices? A careful study of this lesson will help answer those questions. The Bible teaches us today that:

God's Way is the Right Way!

Joseph's life reminds us:

- 1. Daily we struggle under temptation.**
- 2. Daily God leads us toward future blessings.**

1. Daily we struggle under temptation.

After reading the Bible's account of Joseph's life, you might conclude that he had more trouble in his life than anyone else of his era – or any era. Or you could conclude that he was the most God-blessed man who ever lived! It's safe to say that he had mean brothers. But these mean brothers didn't beat him up or stuff him in a garbage can. They sold him into slavery! In the verses before today's lesson, we see that God blessed him, even in that terrible situation. *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. 2 The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, . . . Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. . . The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. 6 So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. (Genesis 39:1-6)*

So it would appear that everything turned out pretty well, wouldn't you say? But there was more trouble and more temptation on the horizon. *Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, 7 and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"* There's more trouble here for Joseph than meets the eye. Remember, he was a slave – not in the same sense as blacks in the South in 1840 – but a slave none the less. If he said “no”, he could get in trouble, as he soon found out. If he said “yes”, he could get in even bigger trouble with the husband. But in the end it wasn't the moral dilemma that led Joseph to do the right thing, it was the fact that he knew that **God's Way is the Right Way!** *8 But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. 9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.*

Let's just pause for a moment and talk about temptation because Joseph isn't the only person in the history of the world to experience this kind of pull to do the wrong thing. **Daily we struggle under temptation.** Do you have any idea how easy it would have been for Joseph to rationalize giving in to Mrs. Potiphar? After all, he might say, “I'm her slave. And besides, she's pretty easy on the eyes.” How would you have done in a similar situation? And then there's the “can't win” scenario. How do people put that, “Damned if I do and damned if I don't!”

Whether it is raging hormones in our bodies, the limitless number of TV channels, the booze bottle in the pantry or dark side of the internet, we all face temptation daily. The hymn writer described it pretty well:

**I walk in danger all the way; the thought shall never leave me
That Satan, who has marked his prey, is plotting to deceive me.
This foe with hidden snares may seize me unawares
If e'er I fail to watch and pray; I walk in danger all the way.**

That's what Jesus' disciples experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane – and beyond. That's what Job faced under the most difficult of circumstances. And that's what we experience – temptation. And there are a thousand reasons to resist – emotional pain, physical harm, destruction of relationships, disappointing those who love us. But Joseph put his finger on the only real reason to resist. *How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?* He knew that every sin we commit is not just a sin against another human being. It is a sin against God. Every single sin disregards God's law, destroys our relationship with him and disrupts whatever peace and happiness that he can give.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)* There's where we can turn in time of temptation. The Psalmist wrote, *I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from? 2 My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalms 121:1-2)* The Psalmist's Lord is our Lord. Not only does he give us strength against temptation. He is the God of free and faithful grace who forgives us when we give in to temptation. So when we do battle against those daily temptations, we also have God's assurance that **Daily God leads us toward future blessings.**

2. Daily God leads us toward future blessings.

At first reading it doesn't appear that things are going to turn out well for Joseph. *11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.* What is the old saying? “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!” Well that's how it turned out for Joseph. First, in the verses we skipped, she turns the rest of the household staff against Joseph. The account goes on, . . . *She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."* This was a game of “he said, she said,” that Joseph had no chance of winning. So the outcome was predictable. *19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. 20 Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.*

“See what happens when you try to do the right thing,” some would say. But in Joseph's case, that was not the end of the story. *But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21 the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made*

responsible for all that was done there. 23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. And it didn't stop in the prison! Joseph was blessed in such a way that he ended up being the equivalent of the secretary of agriculture during a drought and was almost single-handedly responsible for saving the population of Egypt and beyond from starvation. He became a national hero!

“But that will never happen to me no matter how good I am,” you might say. If you said that, you’d probably be right. God gave some extraordinary blessings to Joseph in his life. You can read about them in Genesis 40-50. But there is, most certainly, a lesson that we can take home today from this story about Joseph. When we learn that **God’s Way is the Right Way**, we will be reminded again and again that **Daily God leads us toward future blessings**.

We may experience those blessings in this lifetime. If you could ask a person to whom God has given the blessing of being able to finally say “no” to a bottle of alcohol, they might tell you about the blessings of sobriety, the joy of repaired relationships and improved physical health. If you were to ask a young woman to whom God gave the blessing years ago of being able to say “no” to her impatient boyfriend, she might tell you about the blessings of a good conscience, a better relationship with her husband and the ability to share her experience with her own children. If you could talk to someone whom God has blessed by restoring their love for God’s Word and Sacrament after years of being absent, they could tell you the joy of a closer walk with their Savior and an ability to refocus their lives to serve God. **God’s Way is the Right Way** and sometimes that becomes clear to us in our lives.

But even if we don’t see it as clear as crystal in this life, God promises that we will see it some day – in the future glory that he has in store for us. He’s given us a glimpse of that glory in the Bible and he most certainly has given us the encouragement to live our lives for Jesus until he comes again. In the book of Hebrews we read, *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)*

Fix your eyes on Jesus. He’s the source of our strength to resist sin. He’s our motivation to live according to God’s will, and he’s the source of forgiveness when we fail. **God’s Way is the Right Way!** Even though we **Daily struggle under temptation**, God **Daily God leads us toward future blessings**.

**Jesus, lead us on ‘till our rest is won.
Heavenly Leader, still direct us; still support, console, protect us.
Till we safely stand in our fatherland!**

Amen.