

Sermon Reading: 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.

¹⁶ 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.

Sermon Theme: Sometimes It Is Best to Run

"What was I supposed to do? I had no other choice. I know it was wrong but there was nothing else I could do" When facing sin and temptation sometimes that's how we feel. That sly devil comes whispering in your ear, the world around you tells you what your own sinful nature wants you to believe, and you might find yourself thinking that maybe the best and only option you have is to sin. You know it's against God's will and know it is wrong, but because of the situation you can convince yourself that it is actually better to sin than to resist it. But the reason and circumstances don't change the action; you went against God's will and sinned. The best option always is to run away from sin.

When reading Genesis 39 it doesn't seem like that's true for Joseph. Here he is a slave to Potiphar and because he resists sin and temptation, because he does what is right in God's

sight, he ends up in prison. It had already been rough on Joseph when his brothers decide to sell him into slavery. But the Lord is still with him. It's almost like everything he touches becomes successful. And Potiphar notices; so he puts Joseph in charge of everything and everyone in his household. He trusts Joseph so much that the only thing Potiphar concerns himself with was the food he puts in his mouth.

Someone else was noticing Joseph too. Potiphar's wife sees this slave, how successful and trusting her husband is with him, and on top of that Joseph is a pretty good looking guy—well-built and handsome. There's all sorts of speculation out there finding ways to excuse Potiphar's wife. But the fact is she lets her mind wander to the point where she is going to cheat on her husband and orders Joseph, "Sleep with me!"

What's Joseph supposed to do? For the casual observer it seems pretty clear. But is it? If Joseph says, yes, he could be in big trouble with his master. But, why not say yes? She's the one who came to him; it wasn't his fault he was good-looking. If one were to ignore the complicating details, then they could focus on the benefits of having this different relationship with this woman. Maybe he could get another promotion. Could he eventually win his freedom? And then there's the simple fact: didn't he deserve a little break; something a little extra?

At the same time, who is he—a slave—to say, "No" to his master's wife. She doesn't seem to be the type of woman who heard that "No" word too often. If he says no, she could make his life absolutely miserable. He could lose his position in the house. He could be sold again to a different master. Things were finally getting better for him and now everything he had worked hard for could be taken away from him in an instant.

To a point we can understand the predicament Joseph is in. We are well-versed in weighing the pros and cons when facing a particular temptation and sin. So what does Joseph do? **"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. ⁹No 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?"** Joseph first recognizes the blessings that God had given to him. Joseph doesn't hold anything against Potiphar for being a slave; no, Joseph is content with his position and thankful for it. But ultimately Joseph recognizes who he would be sinning against. It's not Potiphar—although it is implied—but this great evil is ultimately sinning against God!

Whether or not you are tempted with the same sin Joseph was you know how seductive sin can be. Instead of being content with the blessings God gives us, we become jealous of others wanting what they have, the experiences they get to enjoy, the type of life they live.

There's the fear that maybe we are missing out on something and God is holding back from blessing me. We might wonder whether or not it really is in our best interest to follow God's will. We focus on the immediate gratification and how much we will enjoy this right now or the immediate consequences that we might have to face that makes life even more difficult if we do what God wants.

But while our minds are filled up with those things, we fail to pause and consider who we are sinning against, what that means, and how serious it is. Sin destroys your relationship with God. The one who punishes sin to the third and fourth generation. The one who does not let the guilty go unpunished (Exodus 34:7), the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28), that's who you are sinning against.

But even you have resisted a temptation, often it doesn't just disappear. It's not like you beat this level of temptation and get to move on along the game of life not to face it again. No, we see it like Joseph did. Every. Single. Day. When we let our guard down, when we have our guard up, temptation is right there sometimes in our faces, sometimes lurking in the back of our mind. It lets up for a little while until it's back again in full force with reinforcements. So what does Joseph do? He runs away. Heavoids the temptation. He makes sure that he's not left with Potiphar's wife. He gets himself out of the situation before it gets worse.

The truth is that the majority of temptations we face from day to day are not coming at us as a surprise or catching us off-guard. Sadly they are all too familiar to us. So we know what to tell ourselves and we know what we should do. But instead of running away we either stay in the situation or even inch ourselves closer. And then we are quick to throw out, "I had no choice!" even when we know better.

Joseph, on the other hand, keeps resisting. But then one day everyone else is out of the house and Potiphar's wife has Joseph all to herself. She sees her opening and pounces. She grabs onto his garment, "Sleep with me," she says! Again, Joseph runs away but this time she's left holding onto his cloak. By now Potiphar's wife has enough. Potiphar comes back home and she decides it's time to get rid of Joseph, "**That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.**" It didn't matter that Joseph had done the God-pleasing thing; it was her word against a slave's. As Joseph is hauled off into prison I wonder how much of it was him thinking, "Was it worth resisting all those times? Was it worth running away? Wouldn't it have been just easier and better for me if I slept with her?"

And that's what the devil wants us to focus on as we wrestle with temptation again and again. Is the struggle worth it? Is it worth it to tell my spouse the truth when I know the

truth is going to hurt and make life pretty miserable? Is it worth it giving offerings to church when it's already a little tight at home? Is it really worth it stopping this date from going too far; is it really that big of a deal? Is it worth it not sharing those stories or joining in when you know you are going to be looked at as "not one of them"? What sin is it in your life that you struggle to see whether or not it is worth it to keep on resisting?

Some may try and assure you, "All you have to do is let your guard down for a little bit, drop the cross and stop resisting. Get it out of your system, say you're sorry, and then Jesus will forgive you." To that Jesus warns in Luke: "**Whoever wants to save their life will lose it.**" Being a follower of Jesus isn't something where one day you say you are and then when that gets too difficult it's no big deal to stop resisting temptation. Jesus is pretty clear: those who want to follow him must pick up their cross daily. But whoever wants to make their life easier instead of following God's will puts their eternal life in jeopardy.

Yes, resisting sin and temptation is hard. It's not something we enjoy. But even these crosses God uses for the good of his people. God knows how quick I am to trust myself. He knows how my pride is just itching to grab a little more control to pull me away. And so he uses this cross to remind and refine me, to teach me to go to him in prayer and to be in his Word for strength.

That's what God is doing for you too. Jesus doesn't deny that those troubles are hard; he knows it quite well taking on flesh and blood so that he might share in our weaknesses. He isn't naïve about how great of a temptation those sins are and how they attack your brain and your will; he was tempted just as we are. He doesn't ignore your struggle and the trouble of carrying a cross, he carried his own. And what a struggle it was because there was never any option for him to give up his cross or to fall into sin. He was "God's Messiah" God's Chosen One and so it was a **must** for him to **suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life** (Luke 9:22). And that's exactly what Jesus did. Jesus isn't only rejected by the leaders of Israel, God rejects his own Son, so that you would be accepted by God. Jesus suffers the punishment for all sin on that cross so that you will not suffer in hell. He dies and rises to life again so that you too might die to sin and live with him in the forgiveness of sin he wins for you.

Jesus assures you, "You aren't carrying this cross on your own. You have your church family who is here to encourage you with your cross-carrying and temptation-resisting. You aren't alone as you carry your cross, I'm with you always. When you feel that weight bearing down on you, when temptation is whittling away at your will, stop looking to yourself; instead, look to me who already perfectly carried your cross for you. When you are weak, I am strong. You have my grace which I promise is sufficient for you." And it's that grace that works in us the ability and the desire to run away from sin.

Instead of listening to the lies of the devil, instead of listening to the world around you and that sinful nature, listen to Jesus' Words he gives you in the Bible. When you trip and fall into sin, don't ignore it or downplay it, but confess your sin, take it to the Lord knowing that for Jesus' sake he forgives you. Come forward to the Lord's Supper where Jesus picks you up again with his body and blood given for you in the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins. When you are thinking you can't help yourself, can't resist it any longer, that sin is controlling you, remember what you are: a baptized child of God. You have been set free from sin and its power so it cannot and does not control you. Be encouraged, because this life with all its struggle is not the end. But until Christ calls us home be reassured that God does continue to bless us even while we are struggling. We see that with Joseph in Genesis, and with eyes of faith God shows us in our life. Lord, we ask that you continue to strengthen us and be near us as we continue to walk in your way. Amen.