Living Hope
Christian Reformed Church
Belong • Believe • Bless

Sunday, October 18, 2026

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt
Scripture: Genesis 39, 40
Sermon Title: Faithful Service in God's Presence
Transcribed by: Liza Perry

Come to the table.

We are invited to come to the table. ***Isaiah 55:1-3*** says this, *" [5] Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. [2] Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. [3] Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you."*

When Jesus met with His disciples, He was with them at the table. They were eating dinner together, and He said that this table is a place where all people are invited. And this morning we gather at that table together again. We gather at this place where Jesus has reminded us and tells us to eat this in memory of Him, because He has made a covenant with us. And that covenant with us is what allows us to be in relationship with Him. And just as Isaiah wrote that, "You who have no money, come."

And today we saw in that video that everyone is welcome. And sometimes when we think of disabilities, we think of the obvious disabilities, as Danielle mentioned. But today, Jesus invites people who are blind or cannot see well, but also people who can see but do not see others in need or beyond themselves.

Jesus invites people who are slow and cannot move well, as well as people who are fast and don't know how to slow their pace for other people. Jesus invites people who are deaf or cannot hear well, as well as for people who can hear but they block out the cries of pain. Jesus invites people who learn slowly or cannot think well, and He also invites people who learn quickly but choose to close their mind.

Jesus invites people who are sad and cannot be cheered up, and He also invites people who are happy and then avoid all pain. Jesus invites people who are sick and cannot get better. And He invites people who are well and forget to thank God for their health.

Jesus invites people who are kind and serve the needy. And Jesus invites people who are awkward in the face of need. Jesus invites people who feel trapped by their impairments. And Jesus invites people who feel strong but just add to the despair of others.

Jesus invites people who feel worthless and unlovely. And Jesus invites people who feel proud and do not prize the love of God. Jesus invites all people in all creation, that we may all come to the table together to cherish each other and eat the meal which the Lord has provided.

As I prepare the table, I invite the elders to come forward and the praise team to come forward, for they will lead us in a time of worship as we gather at the table. As we gather at this table which our Lord has invited us to.

The Lord's Supper

When Jesus was with His disciples and He broke the bread [P. John breaks the bread], He said, *"This bread is for all of you. Not some of you, but all of you."* And Jesus invites us all to participate. Those of us who have seen and understand Jesus to be our Lord, Jesus says, *"I invite you to come to the table."*

And as Jesus was there with His disciples, He took the cup. [P. John pours the juice] And as He took the cup, He said, *"This is the blood which I shed for you. The body which I break for you. The blood that I shed for you. That I shed for each of you. And for me."* That all of us may come to the table knowing that our sins are forgiven.

As you take the bread, I invite you to ponder on that. To ponder about what it means that Jesus invites you to the table. What is it about you that you are not sure of or that you have been hiding either from others or from Christ? And Jesus says, *"I welcome that part here."* So take hold and think on those things.

[Elders pass out the bread.]

We sing Hallelujah because Christ has risen. But because Christ has risen, He also invites us to the table. And so, as you eat, remember, believe. Know deep within you that your sins have been forgiven by the breaking of the bread in the body of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[Congregation eats bread.]

[Elders pass out the juice.]

Yet not I, but through Christ in me. It is through the shedding of Christ's blood that He is with us. And so, as you drink and as you feel it go down your esophagus, may that remind you that Christ is with you and has washed you clean from the inside out. Be forgiven.

Please join me in prayer. Dear Lord, we thank You for who You are. Lord, we thank You that as the God of all creation, that You sent Your son Jesus to die for our sins so that we may be with You.

And so, Lord, we thank You for that gift. And Lord, may we know that You are always with us. And may we live each moment knowing that we are also with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We just celebrated the Lord's Supper. And today we're going to be looking at a couple of chapters in ***Genesis 39*** and ***Genesis 40***. Interestingly enough, ***Genesis 40*** is about a cupbearer and a baker. The cupbearer was the one who brought the wine to Pharaoh, and the baker was the one who brought the bread to Pharaoh. And we today have celebrated the bread and the wine which Christ brought to us, which gives us life.

When you look at ***Genesis 39 & 40***, in light of time, I'm going to invite you to read this for yourself afterwards and I'll just share some of the thoughts that are in there as it leads to where we are going in today's message.

Genesis 39 begins now. Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an Egyptian, who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him there from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. And if you remember where were a couple of weeks ago, where Joseph was sold by his brothers and was sent down to Egypt. And while he was in Egypt, he was bought to be a slave or a servant of a gentleman by the name of Potiphar. And as Potiphar watched him, he saw how the Lord blessed Joseph and so he made him in charge of all of his house.

Joseph is in his early 20s. Joseph is the only one in scripture, or one of the few men in scripture where it says that he was handsome. Joseph was one good looking dude and the women recognized him, especially Potiphar's wife. And so Potiphar's wife would often come to him and try to lure him into laying with her. And he would always refuse. And one day, when there was no one in the house, she was a little bit more aggressive in that desire. And so Joseph ran. And as he ran away, she grabbed his coat. And as he left, she held onto his coat.

And when the servants came, she said yes, no one was around. *"I screamed, but that Hebrew slave, he tried to seduce me, but I got away and he's left his coat with me."* And then she tells her husband, Potiphar, *"That slave that you brought in, he tried to have sex with me, but I managed to get away and he left his coat."* And so Potiphar doesn't have much choice but to send Joseph to jail.

In jail Joseph also begins to rise. It shows that the Lord was with Joseph. And Joseph rose to a place in which they trusted him above everything else. So they put him in charge of the rest of the prisoners. Then one day as he is in prison, he sees that there is a cupbearer from Pharaoh and a baker from Pharaoh.

And as he is there, he notices that they look distressed. So he asks them what happened. The cupbearer says, *"We've had a dream. The dream was that on this vine branch there were three clusters of grapes and in his hand held a cup and he squeezed the grapes into wine, and he gave it to Pharaoh."* And Joseph says to him that the interpretation belongs to God, but here's what it means: In three days you will have your head lifted and you will be restored to your place.

And then the baker is thinking, *"Well, that sounds pretty good. Let me tell you my dream."* And so he tells his dream in which he has three baskets on top of his head, and there are birds that are eating the bread out of the top basket. And Joseph says to him, *"On the third day, you will have your head lifted from you and you will be killed."*

And then it comes to pass in three days. And as Joseph had told the cupbearer his dream, he says, *"And when you get out, remember me, because I am in here under false accusations."* And then let me end with ***Genesis 40:23***, which says, *"[23] The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him."*

This is a summarized message of the Word. But we will go into this in more detail. Join me in prayer.

Dear Lord, as we go into Your Word, Lord, remind us of the importance of Your Word. Lord, invite us into places where we read every word. But we don't just read it, Lord, but we live it. We pray it. We sing it. Because we know, Lord, that in You there is truth. And so, Lord, as we study this, may we feel Your presence with us. May we know, Lord, that You are here. Will you speak within our hearts that we may know You better? In Jesus name. Amen.

As we look at this, I read ***Genesis 39:1***, but here is the key verses: ***Genesis 39:2-3*** says this, *"[2] The LORD was with Joseph so that 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… "*

And then it goes on to talk about that this phrase, *"... the Lord was with Joseph,"* occurs four times in this passage. In Genesis 39:5, it also says that *"… the Lord blessed Joseph."* But in ***Genesis 39:2, 3, 21 & 23***, there is this phrase, *"...the Lord was with Joseph."* And this comes in the middle of Joseph's story, in the middle part, where he is not with his family and where he is not serving Pharaoh.

This comes in those years in the middle, where he is spending as a slave in a foreign country, where he is in prison for invalid accusations. And there he meets him.

But you'll also know that it uses the word LORD with small capitals. When in Scripture you read the word LORD with small capitals, it actually refers to the name Yahweh. It is the personal name of God. And so Moses, as he is writing this piece about Joseph, is writing it in a way to remind people that it isn't just that God thought about Joseph, but there was a personal connection to Joseph, and Joseph knew that God was there.

And in fact, if you look at this concept of God being with us, God's presence changes all of his life, all of our life. Knowing that God is present. If you know that God is present with you, you live differently. In good times, you know that it is God who gives this to you. In hard times, you know that even in this, God is still present. And so what we're going to see today is in these two chapters, how God's presence with Joseph determines how he lives and how it helps him through all of his pieces.

First of all, God's presence changes his work. When you look at him as a servant or as a slave, when you see him as a prisoner, it says that the Lord blessed him because when he worked, he served his master faithfully. He served Pharaoh's men faithfully.

I mean, you have to understand that when Joseph was in prison and the cupbearer and the baker came in, they were of a much higher rank than Joseph ever was. And yet Joseph is there serving the people above him, just as he served the people under him for Potiphar. But now he also is in a leadership position over these people, and he is serving them with kindness.

Colossians 3:23-24 says, *"[23] Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, [24] since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."*

We need to remember that in everything we do, it is of service to God.

Richard D. Phillips, in his commentary, says, *"Our most important duty to the surrounding culture is the blessing of our witness to Jesus Christ."*

Do we—in all that we do—whether it is at home or at work or in community, do we do everything with service to Christ? It is important that we also not just do our work, but that we also notice the needs of others.

Did you see how in ***Genesis 40***, when the cupbearer and the baker were there, it says that they looked dejected and Joseph noticed that part of our witness is noticing other people? What are the needs that other people have? What are the needs that they need to hear as well? And how do we recognize them?

And you'll also notice that he says to them that interpretation belongs to God. When he tells them the Word of God, he tells them that this is God's Word. *"These aren't my ideas."* He sends them basically to God. But notice also he doesn't try to make nice the justice of God. He speaks truth to the cupbearer. *"Here's what's going to happen. Your head will be lifted in three days and you'll be restored to your spot."*

But then he also speaks truth to the baker. He also reveals to the baker, *"God is a God of justice and we are held accountable."*

We don't know why the cupbearer and the baker were in prison. There are many who speculate that there was a plot on Pharaoh's life and maybe the baker was part of that. But Joseph doesn't try to ease the baker's pain and says, *"Well, in three days, yeah, it's going to be a tough day for you. Hang in there, we'll pray for you and maybe it'll work out."*

No, Joseph's pretty clear. *"Here it is. In three days you will have your head lifted from you as well, but it will be from you and not for you."* So Joseph is truthful.

And God's presence also allows for victory over temptation. When Potiphar's wife came on to Joseph over and over again, it would have been easy for him to just say, *"Okay, I'm just going to give in to this."* But he resisted temptation. In fact, in the last case, he actually fled from temptation. And you might think, *"Well, here's sexual temptation for a 25 year old. That could be tough."* But I want you to think much past that for just a moment.

Joseph is working for Potiphar and his wife. What does refusal of an order from his wife mean for him? It means, as we see, he loses his job. And I think oftentimes it's easy in this case to go, *"Well, that was, you know, that."*

But let's bring this a little bit more home. What about us in our work situation and our boss asks us to do something which is better for the company, but we know it isn't right, and we know if we don't do it, we lose our job. Do we do it?

Or do we say, *"I can't do this because I know that I'm sinning before God?"* Joseph's first response was that this was a sin before God. That was his first response. It wasn't a response of, *"Well, actually, ma'am, this wouldn't be a proper activity for me because you're married and I'm not. I need to not do this."* Or, *"No, this wouldn't be good for me because I told Potiphar that I would respect everything that belongs to him."* His first reaction was, *"This is a sin against God."*

David says in ***Psalm 51:3-4a***, *"[3] For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. [4] Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;"*

Do we, when we are faced with temptation, no matter what that temptation is, understand that the first sin is against God? And do we have and know that God's presence there allows us to have victory over that?

Richard D. Phillips again, says this: *"Above all other considerations, he was concerned not to dishonor or offend God by sinning"...*

That was his first and most important thought. Not, *"How will other people feel about this?"* Not, *"What will my name be like if I do this?"* It was, *"How will I offend God?"*

And then he goes on to say, *"By refusing to sin with Potiphar's wife, Joseph reminds us that faithfulness to God involves not only our work for him but also the godliness of our lives at home and in private."*

But remember the verse, *"God was with Joseph."* God's presence is with you.

In ***1 Corinthians 10:13***, it says, *"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it."*

Now, some of us sometimes think, *"Well, God, that was just too much. I couldn't handle that one by myself and so I gave in."* Well, that's not God's fault. That's my fault. That's me not taking the way out. That's me not fleeing from the situation.

Joseph fled before it got very far. Joseph didn't say, *"How close can I get to this line without getting caught?"*

As I've said before, if there are warm chocolate chip cookies that come out of the oven and you're told not to eat them, don't stand in the kitchen. Go outside, because after a while the smell will make you think, *"Oh, just one will be okay."* God says, *"Flee from this. Set up ways so that you don't get close to this."*

R. Kent Hughes in this piece says, *"In short, Joseph refused to sin against a) the trust given him, b) the woman's husband, and c) God himself. And because he was faithful in all relationships, he could resist being unfaithful in this instance."*

When we have our relationship with Christ in order, it is much easier to say no when we are tempted. It's much easier to say, *"We need to go to a place where I can honor Christ in all I do."*

And it's interesting that Joseph was put in prison. The fact that Joseph was put in prison tells us that Potiphar did not think his wife was speaking the truth. Because if he thought his wife was speaking the truth, Joseph would be dead. So God protected Joseph in this place as well.

God informed Potiphar that Joseph was not guilty, but Potiphar had to do something, so he threw him in prison. And so even in that, God is with them. God's presence allows for silence.

Now, this might be one that we have to think about for a minute, but as you read this entire story of Joseph, you'll notice that Joseph never gives a defense or a complaint about any of his trials. He understands that God is working behind all of this.

In ***Genesis 49***, he actually says to his brothers, *"You meant this for evil, but God meant this for good."* But Joseph gives silence. He chooses to move to silence rather than slander and bitterness, because Joseph does not play the victim. Joseph says, *"I know that God is with me."* God is there.

We see later on in Scripture that there was another man who stood in silence, and that was Jesus. Jesus also stood in silence before Pilate, just as Joseph stood in silence before Potiphar. Joseph stood in silence in prison.

Now, while he was in prison, he did ask to be remembered. But the art of silence allows God to be God. God is sovereign. God is just, and it allows God to be God.

Now, having said that, there are times we need to speak up with injustice. I am not saying that we need to be silent all the time. But there is a way to speak, and oftentimes our speaking up is done in revenge or in bitterness or in this aspect of *I am the victim*, as opposed to what is true justice.

Joseph pleaded to be remembered by the cupbearer, which we see later that the cupbearer forgot. But there are times and there are situations when the correct response is just to be quiet and to move on. God's presence creates transformation.

James 1:2-4 says, *"2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*

God being with us allows for God to transform us. You'll notice that Joseph has a new sensitivity. When he's talking to the cupbearer and the baker about their dreams, it is not the same, shall I say, arrogant speech that he gave to his brothers. But now it is a matter of, *"Here is what the Lord says and I am simply being His servant."*

Going through suffering allows us to be sympathetic and compassionate to other people in suffering. When we have gone through stuff, we know what it's like and as we walk alongside other people, we become much more sensitive to that aspect.

For those of us who have ever dealt with a person in our family who's dealt with cancer, suddenly people who deal with cancer, we have a much different view of it. Or with mental illness or with a disability. Soon we go through all of these things and we see how God is forming us to become more sensitive as we go through trials of our own.

And transformation. For Joseph, it transformed him to be a man of grace who was then able to lead. God needed to do a heart transformation on Joseph from the time that he left Canaan to the time that he was in Pharaoh's service.

R. Kent Hughes quotes ***V. Raymond Edman*** by saying, *"Delay never thwarts God's purposes; it only polishes his instrument."*

We are the instruments of God who need polishing.

God's presence also gives proper identity. You'll notice here that Joseph was a God-fearing slave or prisoner, not a slave or prisoner who was God-fearing.

In today's society, it is so easy to get caught up in an identity of something other than who we are in Christ. And as Christians we have our identity in Christ. And so we are Christian first. We are, as we sang with our children, I am a C and you can go on and fill in the rest. We are a Christian first. We are not, this is me who happens to be a Christian.

My identity is not in my business. My identity is not in my family. My identity is not in you. Fill in the blank. My identity is in Christ. And when I know that my identity is in Christ, that changes how I see everything else.

God's presence also gives hope in hard times. I don't know if you realize this. Oftentimes when we read scripture, it goes from one story to the next. And so we got ***Genesis 38*** that happens and ***Genesis 39***, we're like, *"Oh yeah, Joseph got sold into Egypt and he was with Potiphar and a couple days later, he went to prison because Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. And then he was in prison for a little bit."*

There is a total of 13 years between the time that Joseph got sold by his brothers and the time that he starts serving Pharaoh. Thirteen years of hard times. Joseph was forgotten again and again by people. We read that at the end of ***Genesis 40*** that the cupbearer forgot him, but he was never forgotten by God. Because throughout ***Genesis 39***, and it carries into the context of ***Genesis 40***, it says that God was with him.

And I think oftentimes when bad things happen, we go, *"Where is God in this? If God is for us, then how can this be happening to us?"*

And ***Richard D. Phillips***, I think, puts this well when he says, *"A more biblical question is to ask not why bad things happen to good people but why good things ever happen to such bad people as we are."*

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't like being called a bad person. But I think when I compare myself to what God has called me to be, then I realize that I am not really a good person.

In scripture, Jesus, when He was asked by a man who said, *"Good teacher*,*"* He said, *"Why do you call me good?"* Because only God is good. We are bad people. In comparison, we say, *"Well, I'm better than so and so, maybe."* But in reality, we are all sinners. We all fall short. We all come to the table as a sinner, and we need God in that.

Mike mentioned at the beginning, those of us who are here on Friday night watching the movie *I Can Only Imagine 2*, Tim Timmons had a phrase in there which I thought did really well: *grief and gratitude.* That's where Joseph's at, right? He's thankful that God is with him, but he is also really grieving.

And I think in life we have to hold those two in connection as well. We have grief in our life, but we need to also have gratitude.

R. Kent Hughes goes on to say, “Joseph’s life teaches us that disappointments are essential to spiritual growth because they demand faith and resting all hope upon God.”

And that's where we need to come to. We need to come to this point where we understand that God being with us gives us hope.

Romans 5:2b-5 says this, *“[2] And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. [3] Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; [4] perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5] And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”*

And so we have hope. And we have hope because just as it says in the first part and the last part of ***Genesis 39***, *“The Lord was with him.”* And you and I can say, *“The Lord is with us.”*

And maybe that's the first question that we need to ask: ***Am I aware that the Lord is with me? And is this awareness more than just a head knowledge? Am I willing to stake my life on this even when I don't feel it?***

The second question is: ***Where do I put my identity? Have I put my identity in Christ as Joseph did? Have I made that the central part for all my thinking? Or is my identity in my work or in my family or in something else? Where is my identity?***

And then thirdly: ***Does my life reflect the presence of God? Potiphar recognized that the Lord was with him. Do I recognize the same?***

I invite the praise team to come on up as we ponder that for just a moment, as we think about where I put my identity. ***As we think about it, am I aware that God is present with me? And does my life reflect the presence of God?***

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You that You are with us. And Lord, I need to admit there are lots of times when I don't feel like You're with me. Lord, help me to remain in that space knowing that You are.

And Lord, there are times when I don't live my life like You are with me. And Lord, forgive me for those times. And Lord, help us all to recognize that Your presence is always with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We just sang that my faith will be made stronger in the presence of my Savior. God is with us.

And God being with us is a way to increase our faith, but it's also a way to encourage each other. In ***2 Corinthians***, Paul writes this: *“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice, strive for restoration, encourage one another.”*

We encourage each other by reminding each other, *“The Lord be with you.”* And one of those ways to remind and encourage each other is through prayer individually, but also together.

And so, if you would like someone to pray with you, we invite you to come to the front afterwards, and people will pray with you to encourage you and to remind you that the Lord is with you.

And as you go, I invite you to extend your hands to receive this blessing from God.

May the love and the peace of God be with you. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.