

How many of you have your "Be a Blessing" stones with you from last week? For those of you who weren't here, these stones are to remind us of the promise that God made to Abraham when he was called to leave his family and go into the land where God would direct him. Implicit in his calling is to be a blessing to all those that he would meet, so that he would be blessed as well.

That stone we've been carrying around, sometimes I think it must be magic. There are moments where I completely forget that it is there, light as a feather in my pocket, just blending into the normal clutter on my desk. It's natural and normal. But then there are the times where it seems to be the biggest, heaviest burden in my life. I want to take it out of my pocket. There's no more room in there to fit anything else. I want to put it aside for something else. And on some particularly challenging days, it's all I can do to ignore it at my desk. Like it's just sitting there staring at me, calling out, "pay attention to me!!" And all I want to say to it is "be quiet, I'm trying to work!" Anyone else feel something like this over the last week?

It's amazing, the challenge of God's promises to us. Heavy and light at the same time.

We jump quite a ways in our biblical story this morning. From the beginning to the end of Genesis almost. We've missed the story of Isaac, the story of Jacob. But if you can recall in those stories, the people of God have the same trouble with that promise of God that we do. There are times where it comes easy, but more often where is a huge challenge and they forget. And Joseph, poor Joseph.

It is often too easy for us to look at the story of Joseph and see how he is just not lucky. How he is just this sad persecuted boy, turned into a sad persecuted man. We see all that struggle that Joseph goes through, but then we read that the Lord makes him prosper.

Let's recap Joseph's life up to this point. He is the 10<sup>th</sup> son of Jacob, the second youngest, but the favored one, birthed by the favored wife Rachael. Rachael then dies giving birth to his younger brother, Benjamin. Because Joseph is the favored son of Jacob, he receives a special coat. And that coat causes him to be thrown in the pit by his brothers. Thrown in the pit and then sold into slavery.

Not to great a life up to this point I think. But before we start feeling to sorry for Joseph, for thinking that this righteous and blessed follower just has the world against him, we need to remember that Joseph is part of a complicated family. And I think we all can know what that is like.

Joseph has that dream remember. That dream with the stars and the stalks of wheat. Where the other stalks of wheat bow down to him, and the sun and moon and stars bow to him as well. I know some of you know or have known some 17 year olds, and 17 year olds who are younger siblings. I'm sure that Joseph did not deliver the news of this dream to his brothers and father in a way that was entirely innocent or gentle. Did he think himself too important to be out with his brothers that day tending the sheep, the day he went looking for them and they threw him in the pit? Possibly. But it doesn't really matter.

It also doesn't matter who did what to whom, or who deserved what, or who was prosperous or not in this story of Joseph.

Joseph, just like the rest of us, sometimes forgets that the call from God means that we need to be a blessing to others. Joseph forgot that with his brothers I think. I also understand

that, and I think you do to if you have siblings. Joseph forgets to be a blessing to his father and to his mothers. Yup, I think we've all been there too.

So then, Joseph finds himself in situations in his life that are not so wonderful. Its not that he deserves this and he didn't cause himself to be in those situations. But, just like it does for us sometimes, life turns for the worse for Joseph.

What I love, really absolutely love about this text and the story of Joseph, is that, even though Joseph is a cocky little teen, has rough family dynamics, is thrown in a pit to die, is sold into slavery, is accused falsely of a crime and then thrown in prison, even through all of this, we hear in the text these words over and over again; "The LORD was with Joseph". The Lord is with Joseph in the pit. The Lord is with Joseph when he is taken to Egypt. The Lord is with Joseph.

And it must be that while in Egypt, Joseph remembers that his Be a Blessing stone is not a burden. Because what happens? The text tells us that his master sees that the Lord is with him. This is the response from others when we are a blessing, others are able to see that the Lord is with us. And because of that, the house of Potiphar is blessed. When we are a blessing to others, God's blessing extends beyond where we think it should go.

Now, we are human, and so we mess that blessing up. We take advantage of it. We abuse it. The enticement of power is too much for us, and we abuse the privilege that comes with is. Potiphar's wife abuses he power and tries to take what is not hers, and when she doesn't get it, she get's Joseph thrown in jail. Potiphar quickly forgets the blessings that he has received from God and without question, throws Joseph in jail.

I said earlier that it felt sometimes like my blessing stone was magic. But as much as love magic stories, God's blessing is not magic. God's blessing doesn't magically release of from

the hardships in our life. God was with Joseph in that pit, but Joseph was still sold into slavery. God was with Joseph in Potiphar's house, but he was still thrown in jail. God was with Joseph in jail, but the doors weren't opened for him to walk through.

It's important to remember that in this story God is not a puppet master, controlling everything for some ultimate Godly purpose. These things that happen in this story are not good. They are examples of the sin and evil that humanity is able to possess. What is important here is to recognize that through all of this horrible stuff, God is with Joseph and is able to work it for good in his life.

Blessing does not mean good things will happen to us all the time. Blessing means that God is with us through all the horrible things and is constantly trying to help us through it.

These stones that we have are not magic. They won't transport us out of the horribleness of life. They don't solve problems. They don't make complicated family dynamics easier, they won't set someone free from jail. They won't make false accusations go away. But they will serve as a reminder that God is with us. Always.

God is with us in the pits of our life. The pits where there is no water, where we feel we might die. God is with us, and we are still called to be a blessing. Because God's blessing is not just for us, it is for all those that are around us too. Even those that have us enslaved, yes even for the guards of our prison. Because God's blessing is transformative, God's promise is for all of creation, even in the places where we might not think to find it and for the people who we think might not deserve it. Because really, none of us are deserving of God's blessing if we are keeping tally. Joseph, even when he get's out of jail and gets a lot of power in Egypt, forgets to be a blessing and hoards all the grain. Joseph still forgets. We still forget. But God does not forget. God still works in us, in this world for us to be transformed

by God's presence, to be transformed by being a blessing to others. It's going to be hard, it already is hard. Our ultimate blessing is that God is with us, even in those places where we think we are alone. God is with us, let's share that promise with everyone else. Thanks be to God. Amen.