

Sermon: Setbacks, Setups and Comebacks      TPH

Genesis 37:1-11

August, 21, 2016

This announcement was in a church bulletin in a congregation: The Outreach committee has enlisted 25 visitors to make calls on people who have not been afflicted by the church.

Setbacks and setups are afflictions every person has or will encounter on their journey. What is essential to a person or a community experiencing and enjoying the journey of a new beginning and a comeback is attitude.

This morning we are beginning together in a new way. And if we are realistic, we all are continually beginning in a new way every day for every day brings different opportunities to change the way we look at and respond to our lives.

I do not believe we are in a setback position or a setup position at Living Spirit. I believe we are in a comeback position with regard to how to be the heart, hands and feet of God in a community of faith. The opportunities we have to create together and dream new dreams and act into our creations and dreams are endless. If any of us feel we have been setback as a congregation, I want to remind us that God has not put us aside. God has not set us down. Every perceived or experienced setback is the perfect environment for God to co-create with us

a setup for a comeback to who we are now and where we need to go and how we need to travel with one another. We have not failed. And if you believe we have then know for certainty that failure is not final. Failure is not fatal. God can use everything we have been through these last seven and a half years as energy for our now and for our future. In Isaiah 61:3 the Prophet reminds us: To provide for those who mourn in Zion (LSU), to give them a garland instead of ashes. The oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit, They will be called oaks of righteousness. The planting of the Lord, to display [Her] glory.” Our banners hanging over the choir remind us of this very truth.

Joseph was having a crummy day that for a long while he perceived as a crummy life. When he was born, Jacob, his father, favored him because he was born from the union Jacob had with Rachel who was his true love. Joseph grew up dreaming about going to Western or McGill but his life turned out to be the pits. His siblings didn't want to play street hockey with him or take him to a Flames game. In fact that didn't even like him or care for his well-being. Jacob made Joseph a spectacular coat of many colours, which was certainly more attractive than the potato sacks his brothers wore as they watched over the family flocks. Joseph's brothers were sick and

tired of their father sending Joe out to watch them and return home with a negative report. I don't know about you but from where I stand and observe I believe Jacob setup his children to resent one another from, the moment he began to show favoritism by lowering the bar for Joseph. What Jacob did do very successfully was follow his family pattern by pitting Joseph against his older brothers before he could even suckle. The culture he created in his home was one of secrecy, comparison and undermining of his children's human and spiritual value, gifts and purposes. Passive aggressive Jacob created, seeded, planted and watered an environment of assumption, judgement and hatred. So the first chance Joseph's brother's get they throw him into a pit, tell their father a lie, wash their hands of their role and the story unfolds. Joseph is in the pit, translated "the underworld" and he is having a hell of a life.

Have any of you ever had a day, week, month, year or decade when nothing seems to go right? I don't wake up singing, "Oh Happy Day" or "Happy" by Pharrell Williams every day. My mantra is, "Thank you for this day. Thank you for being with me in this day. I want to be your heart, hands and feet. I need your help. Thank you for what is as this is the place you want me to be so I can learn how to be more like you. I love you." Most of the time I mean these words but I have to admit that sometimes these words feel mechanic.

I don't imagine Joseph ordering a Double Double through the window at Tim's or posting a Facebook status. He is not setting up a date at Lake Bonavista for ice cream and Frisbee. He is in hell. He is in hell for being his father's son and for dreaming dreams he didn't have the maturity to fully understand at the time. First the sheaves bow down to his sheaf and then the galaxy bows down to him. The younger will be in charge of the older. This turns his brother's world upside down. I can imagine how thrilled his brothers were to hear the favorite son's dreams, their eyes rolling at one another as steam shot out their ears. In our modern day Joseph most likely sounded like Joel Olsteen on the cover of Times Magazine declaring he was the eighth wonder of the world. At best all Joseph can interpret is that his brothers and father misunderstand him. I mean after all, God has called Joseph to be a leader where his family will need him in some way. Don't they get it? Joseph's dreams became a living nightmare.

Dreams are dangerous, especially when we know without a doubt that they originated in God and we decide to follow them. Why is this? Dreams are dangerous because God often transcends the initial dream and we find ourselves in trouble or in a pit, jail or prison or worse yet, accused of things we have not done. Martin Luther King's dream is still on the horizon and

causing civil unrest in America. Abraham Lincoln's dream still has people receiving holes in their heads. And Christ's dream still has all of us wondering why we have to love a neighbour who is so very different from our way of thinking or doing things, someone we don't even like. After all, who among us wants to love enough like God to be persecuted by family and friends and hung out naked to dry?

Maybe the question we need to look at in the coming days is, "What is my dream for my spiritual maturity and what is our dream for Living Spirit United Church?" And if God answers your dream, my dream and our dream as a faith community, will we be able to interpret the meaning of these dreams? The reality is that not everyone in your life, my life and in our church life wants dreams to come true, especially if it requires changing or exercising humility or forgiveness or leaving something behind in order to move forward.

A Syrian refugee dragged 17 people in Mediterranean waters into Germany to begin a dream. I would bet her dream of a better future did not involve that horrific swim and I know at that time in her life dreaming of competing in the 2016 Olympics would feel like a ridiculous. Not all dreams come to fruition but sometimes they do. God knows when we need to change our direction and change can feel dangerous but we should never stop dreaming for when we do, we stop living. To

cease to dream, to cease to act upon our dreams is to cease to live. Maybe, just maybe, we miss the mark because we dream too low and hit the mark of least resistance with an empty gold medal.

In the age span from 5 to 10 I dreamed that I would go live with my mother, escaping all I knew and my life would be downhill into love, family and success. But God's dream for me was to prepare me for yesterday and today and tomorrow and God knew the people and experiences I would need to equip me for my calling. God's dream contained necessary detours and crossroads so I would learn to trust the Sacred with all my heart and not lean on my own understanding, assumptions and protective mechanisms that no longer served but hurt me. God knew my dream needed to implode before it could explode into the Divine so I could courageously offer my gifts. God sent me people, obstacles, including pieces of myself, pits and setbacks, to teach me the meaning of and my role in my dreams. My past has taught me how to climb and persevere and enjoy my journey, to stop complaining and to stop looking forward to taking a brief selfie on some perceived mountaintop. God is looking for gratitude. History shows us that God is not interested in aptitude, the Sacred is interested in transforming our attitudes into comebacks beyond our wildest dreams.

Joseph goes from one pit to another, Potiphar's wife sets him up but God uses Rueben to save his life and his dream. Folks God uses those who would throw us into a pit to keep divine dreams alive. Setups and setbacks are detours, pit-stops, so we can rest and re-evaluate our response to the next situation and we all know that the next situation is just around the corner. It always is...thanks be to God who is with us in hidden ways and in obvious ways. Joseph was thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, then falsely accused, thrown into jail and then boom! He is second in command to Pharaoh, the enemy of his people because why? Because God's dreams are not thwarted. God's ways are not our human ways of seeing, being and doing things. We need the pit-stops to learn how to listen, see and trust God.

The Good news is that God is preserving my dream, your dream and our spiritual family dream and Creation's dream. I have learned through many experiences that though lovers or dreams die or change, love and a dream is not lost because death has no dominion. Death of a dream only has the life, the energy, we give to it. What God has for Living Spirit United Church will not be stopped by anyone. Like Christ, all of us can be born again when we decide to practice in the light what we have learned in the light what we have learned in the dark. We would be wise to remember that dark and light are the same to God.

Friends, let's begin to dream again. Today, we are together in a new moment in time and the story of Joseph has many things to teach us, one being, that dreamers do not die easily. Let's throw away objectives and goals, throw away bottom lines and status quo thinking and begin dreaming together again. Let's put aside the flies in my office, the roof decaying and the organ is a fire hazard and the fact that even with pictures inside the kitchen cabinets no one knows where to put things except for the people who are tired of putting things away. Let's forget what lies behind and reach forward together, in open, honest, transparent and authentic conversations where we dare dreaming into what lies ahead. Maybe some of our dreams will be out of our reach but the generations that follow us may see them fulfilled. If we want to be a congregation that is and worships with the LIVING SPIRIT then I believe the Spirit wants us to GO FOR IT! DARE TO DREAM. PUT OUR HEART, HANDS, FEET and MONEY where our big mouths are and jump! The flight may feel dangerous but the net...don't worry, God...will catch us. This I can and will promise. Do you want to have some fun? Let's get on the trampoline of Faith, Hope and Love, the greatest of these being Love and throw a whole lot of fun into our jumping without regret.

VIDEO

Setups and Setbacks are prerequisites for comebacks. Dreaming can be dangerous but I would rather live my life risking to dream and living into those dreams than remain rotting away full of regrets in a pit. Let's dare to dream dreams together that include the whole world.

A Methodist Church sign recently said: Jesus had two Dads and he turned out just fine.

May we dare greatly. Amen.