

How is God working in your life? How do you know? How can you see what God is doing around you? And once you see, what will you do? Those are the questions posed by today’s readings from scripture.

We begin with the story of Joseph, the youngest of the 12 sons of Jacob. Leah had 10 sons, Rachel had two, Benjamin and Joseph. And last week we heard the story of how, because of the favoritism of their father and Joseph’s dream which suggested that all would bow down before him, the brothers became angry and vengeful and sold Joseph into slavery which took him to Egypt and the Pharaoh’s prison.

This morning we listened to what is almost the end of Joseph’s long story (see chapters 39 – 50 for the whole story). Because he such an interpreter of dreams, he is able to anticipate the long drought in the Middle East and the Pharaoh puts him in charge of the wheat storage and dispensary. Eventually his brothers show up looking for help because the family is starving back in Palestine. Joseph recognizes his brothers and connives to confront them. They finally have their reunion. And Joseph tells the brothers this: “it was not you who sent me, but God . . . go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt; come down unto me.”

Joseph, who is treated badly by his brothers and sold into slavery, sees that God is at work in his life, and that, as Paul says in the letter to the Romans, “ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

Joseph’s life has been hard and difficult. He has born much grief but, in the midst of all of that, he clung to the living God, who did not abandon him, but helped him to see how life could abound, even in the midst of great trial and tribulation. Joseph’s life is rooted in God no matter what happens to him.

Jesus’ story this morning is very different. He has been teaching the multitude a great heresy. He tells them that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person but rather what comes of the mouth. In other words, what one speaks, can defile the whole situation and the person who is speaking.

It is hard for us to grasp the effect of these words, for certain devout Jews spent a great deal of time keeping themselves pure by keeping the law which entailed certain rules for what you could eat. Jesus tells them that they have their focus on the wrong thing. How they treat one another, what they say, has far more impact on their relationship with God than rules for eating.

And then, Jesus moves on. He is traveling along the Mediterranean coast, the region where Canaanites, not Jews, live. He is confronted by a woman who wants help for her son. The disciples consult with him “what shall we do, we want to send her away.” Jesus says, “*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” And when she confronts him directly, “*It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.*” And then from her: “*Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.*” And suddenly it hits him. Whatever comes out of the mouth, what he speaks, can defile. This woman is a direct invitation from the Father to broaden his focus, to be more inclusive, to open his mind in the same way his heart is already open. And he affirms her faith (which is greater than his in the moment) and her daughter is healed. This story is one of the most startling in the New Testament as we can see Jesus own process of transformation, the working of God in his life.

Both of these stories involve hardship, difficulty, and dis-ease for those involved, in order for major transformation of relationships to occur.

Some of you know that the Vestry has been conducting interviews over the last month with a whole variety of members of the church to get a sense of current needs and future direction. It is project of deep listening to the parish as a whole, and a discernment of how God is working and what the invitation for future action involves.

One of our questions has been about comfort. “How welcome and comfortable do you feel at St. Mary and St. Jude?” It’s a good question because it elicits what keeps people connected to this faith community as well as ways in which we could be more welcoming.

But, I’m beginning to wonder if we shouldn’t be asking “what makes you **un**comfortable here”? “How are you being challenged?” In what ways is your life disrupted? Have you felt like Joseph – betrayed by your family, abandoned perhaps, left to make it on your own, no matter what the circumstances? [The church is not what it used to be – where are the young people?] Or perhaps, like Jesus, someone has said something that caught you up short, that challenged your understanding of truth that even made you resentful and angry. Sometimes when we think we are most right, we can be wrong! But it’s not only that. Such times can be an invitation from the Holy to see and understand differently and be transformed.

So, how do we know that God is working in our lives? I would suggest to you that you ask that question in the midst of discomfort of any kind – illness, grief, disruption, stock market craziness, political wrangling, petty gossip, great tragedy. Joseph could see God’s work over the great span of his years as he reflected on them and held true to his value to love God and those around him no matter what.

And even Jesus could be changed. Changed by a person whose faith drove her to persistence for wholeness for her daughter, whose faith gave her a vision of different reality that she would not let go of, whose faith drove her in the arms of one who could help, once He saw who she was.

The Good News for today is that God works in all of our lives, urging us, cajoling us into becoming the truly vital and loving beings that we are made to be – especially through and in the midst of adversity. And while we gather in this building for worship that will fortify us and form us to become more and more Christ-like, we are challenged to walk into the adversity of our lives and the world around us, knowing not that we are right or we have the truth, but that we, like all who we encounter, are children of the Living God and we all need each other for this life to abound.

So, the next time you encounter turbulence and dis-comfort, dis-ease, in your life, lift up your head, hold fast to your faith and watch for the many ways that God is working in your life!

Amen.

Patricia Rome Robertson+
St. Mary’s by-the-Sea
Northeast Harbor, Maine
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