

Sermon Title: **“God’s Way? How Long? And How small?”**

Bible: **Genesis 45:1-8, 13-15 & Matthew 15:21-28**

When: on Sunday, August 20, 2023

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, thank you so much for your gentle and holy presence in our lives even if we cannot feel your presence. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Life Graph

Last Sunday, we learned about the beginning of Joseph’s story. If I can choose the best moment of Joseph’s life, it is today’s first scripture reading in Genesis from the lectionary. Young Hwapyoung might have chosen Joseph’s best moment as the time when Joseph became 2nd governor in Egypt after he interpreted the Pharaoh’s dream. Beyond all of the challenges, Joseph made a success of his life in a foreign land. Now that I am not that young, I love Genesis 45 the most. That’s because Joseph reveals his own emotions, his own confession, and himself.

Depending on our own perspectives about how to look at our lives, we can make our own life graph. Have you made your life graph before? Based on our life events and experiences, we can draw a line up and down. When was the last time you looked at the events of your life? If it was a long time ago, how about doing it again this week? When I was young, there

was a big line between joy and sadness. Joy and sadness could not be together. But now I understand that there can be tears of joy. When I read Genesis 45, I was able to understand why and how Joseph wept aloud. There were a lot of tears. And there was joy.

2. How Long?

If you looked at Joseph's life in the Bible, it was very tough. There were a lot of ups and downs. He was the most beloved son of his father, but he was bullied by his own brothers. He was sold by his brothers as a slave in Egypt at the age of 17. Even in a foreign land, he was an exemplary slave, and became Potiphar's household manager. However, he was put into prison under a false accusation. Even in prison, he was an exemplary prisoner, and became a prison manager. At the age of 30, he became 2nd governor in Egypt after he interpreted Pharaoh's dream. It took about 13 years to be freed from slavery.

I cannot imagine how tough his life was. But if we look at his sons' names, we can taste the bitterness of Joseph's life in Egypt. His first son's name is Manasseh, which means "making to forget." That's because God had made him forget all his hardship and all of his father's house. His second son's name is Ephraim, which means, "to be fruitful." That's because God had made him fruitful in the land of his misfortunes.

It is not easy to calculate how old Joseph was when he revealed himself to his brothers in Genesis 45. It was the second year of famine, after seven years of plenty. Joseph was at least 39 years old. Thus, it took more than 22 years for Joseph's family to reunite and reconcile

with each other. Even though Joseph died at the age of 110, 22 years is about one fifth of his life, and he had a difficult time during all of his twenties and thirties.

Because we know the whole story of Joseph, it might be easier to say that God had a plan for Joseph. Because it was Joseph's own testimony, we might be comfortable saying that God had a plan for Joseph. But personally, I am very hesitant to say that God might have had a plan for Joseph's life. If God has a plan, could you get through the challenges and struggles for 13 years or 22 years? If God has a plan, and if it is God's way, could you bear the hardships well at the expense of all of your twenties and thirties, or at the expense of your life?

Suffering and hardship are not God's desire for us. They naturally happen in the process of life. God does not promise us a suffering-free or pain-free life. Suffering is not God's punishment, but sometimes it can be the result of our sin or our wrong or poor decisions. Suffering is not God's way of teaching us something, but we may learn something through suffering. In the life of Joseph, what we can learn is that Joseph did not give up his faith that God was with him all the time. Through the ups and downs, he did not forget that God's presence was with him. Where was God when Joseph was sold by his own brothers? Where was God when he was in prison? Where was God when he became the 2nd governor? Where was God when he met his brothers again? Through the ups and downs, Joseph witnessed God's presence in his life.

When you were suffering, where was God? How was God? When you were having success or victory, where was God? How was God? We might ask God how long we need to bear our suffering and hardship. But God might show us how much God loves us, and how much God wants to be with us.

3. How Small?

The second reading from the Gospel of Matthew is about the faith of a Canaanite woman. The Canaanite woman was doubly marginalized. When Jesus fed five thousand men in Matthew 14, women and children were not counted back then. The term “Canaanite” was used for ancient Israel’s pagan enemies. Even Jesus here distinguished the children from the dogs to refuse her request. The word “dogs” here was a very rude term used to describe foreigners or opponents. There were social barriers to a foreign woman. There might be a ‘Jesus’ voice to challenge her. How about you? Are there any social norms that are against you? Is there any inner voice in the face of ‘Jesus’ to ignore, challenge, or reject you? Nevertheless, the Canaanite woman came and knelt before Jesus, and asked one more time! It did not matter how small the crumbs were for the dogs. It did matter that they came from God’s table. God was able to use the smallest. It does not matter how small they are. It matters that God used them. Finally, Jesus answered how great the foreign woman’s faith was. Can you come to our Lord one more time beyond any challenges and beyond how small we are and how little we have?

4. God’s Way?

Many times, we wonder and question what God's plan is, how we know God's will, and what God's way looks like. When you are in suffering and hardship, I hope for us to look at not how long the suffering lasts, but how much God loves us, and how much God wants to be with us through our suffering.

We might think about how small we are and how little we have. Nevertheless, God can use us and what we have, when we come to our Lord boldly beyond social barriers, and our own prejudices within us. That's because we belong to God. With faith, I hope for us to discover God's presence, God's love, and God's grace in our lives, like Joseph and a Cannanite woman.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, we come to you through suffering and hardship. We come to you through the social barriers and our negative inner voices. We come to you one more time, because you are our Lord. Be with us, and help us to grow our faith! In Jesus' name. Amen.