

IN AND OF THE SPIRIT
Sermon for June 6, 2021
By: Jack Fashbaugh
Mark 3: 20-35; Genesis 37: 1-11; 1 Cor. 2: 10b-14

In this morning's reading from *Genesis* we are provided with information that helps us understand why Joseph's brothers sold the young man into slavery. Joseph's brothers resented the privileged position of Joseph in the family – that Joseph was favored by his father, Jacob. Moreover, the brothers thought that Joseph saw himself as a superior person. When Joseph reported his dreams to them, they could not see the possibility that the dreams simply forecasted the future – the time when Joseph, as the practical ruler of Egypt, would be able to rescue the family of Jacob from the prospect of starvation. For the brothers, Joseph's dreams revealed that the young man had an inflated sense of his importance.

As the account in *Genesis* continues, following this morning's reading, Joseph's brothers let their resentment take control of their hearts and minds. For what they perceive as the crime of excessive pride, they punish Joseph severely, though they stop short of killing him, when they sell him to traders headed for Egypt (*Genesis 37: 12-36*). Even if their assessment of Joseph's character is correct, the punishment is, clearly, harsh and unjust. And so, when Joseph is in a position to take revenge, several chapters later, the brothers are afraid. An average man would make them pay for what they did. But Joseph is not average. He has a higher level of consciousness – and not only in his ability of psychic prognostication. Joseph has become capable of seeing God's loving care manifested in the working of nature and human decision-making. He says to his brothers, "Do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (*Genesis 45: 5*). We don't know if Joseph's brothers ever fully appreciated the meaning of the drama in which they involved themselves.

Most people do not like to give much attention to the special capabilities of the human mind. People have stories about a few strange experiences of clairvoyance or premonition they've had – sometimes through dreaming; at other times, through instances of intuition that come to them when awake. But, generally speaking, people don't want to invest much time in thinking about such occurrences. What, though, if we do give such experiences some consideration? What might they demonstrate about us? Suppose you dream one night that an airliner flies down so low near your house that you can see the faces of passengers in the little windows of its fuselage as it floats eerily by, and then, come morning, when you're having a cup of coffee and watching CNN, you learn that a Seven-Forty-Seven has gone down in the South Pacific over-night. A strange coincidence. Suppose that you have a feeling, as you're walking down the street, that you are going to come into some money, you round a corner, and there in your path is a Penney. All right – it's hardly enough to be called *money*; but it is, nevertheless, a piece of legal tender. Suppose you find, after humming a tune you can barely remember, that when you get into your car and turn on the radio, there it is – the record you haven't heard in at least ten years, the sequences of notes you were trying to reproduce a few minutes before. Such events occur in everyone's life. They are easily passed over as coincidences. But if we notice that they occur with some frequency, we may seriously entertain the idea that our consciousness is not completely restricted to the confines of space and time – that our minds can be somewhere other than where we are, objectively speaking, and in a time other than times of remembered experience of the present time. If our minds are capable of going out

beyond confines of space and time, an implication is that our brains, though they make us what we are in what we might call “measurable” aspects, are not our *minds* – that the mind is more than the brain, that it is a thing that can *inform* the brain. From this place in our understanding it is only a small step to the insight that our non-material souls are actual. And here, now, is the ultimate implication: In our higher mind, our mind transcending the limitations of space and time, we become prepared to receive keen awareness of the presence God.

We’ve noticed a significant progression in the story of Joseph. As a very young man, Joseph has the transcendental experience in dreams of seeing a future-time when his brothers and his father will bow down to him in supplication. When the foreseen event actually occurs, Joseph, now a mature man, understands that the Will of God has been manifested in all that has occurred. Joseph progresses from a transcendental state of consciousness to an ultimate condition of awareness; he progresses to God-connectedness.

We can understand why people have difficulty with acceptance of the view of human nature and the terms on which human beings might live that we have been considering. Space and time mean a great deal to us. So do material comforts. We may have difficulty imagining a coherent life without material and temporal moorings. We want to know where our walls are, how the space between them can be made more and more comfortable, and what we can do to secure those walls. The thought of floating through a reality show without familiar boundaries and proportions is not appealing. Moreover, we understand that no matter how spiritualized our consciousness may become, material realities are, after all, real. We cannot ignore biological and very basic psychological facts about ourselves. We may be so aware of these facts that those who seem to want to deny them or set them aside irritate us. Some of us may feel hostility toward those who go about in what seems a kind of dreamy naïveté about how “the real world” operates. Joseph’s brothers dismissed the dreams of Joseph as products of the young man’s arrogance. The psychological fact of ego-consciousness meant, it seems, a great deal to them.

The account in our gospel reading this morning indicates that people, including members of Jesus of Nazareth’s own family, had difficulty understanding Our Lord. When Jesus goes into “a house” with His disciples for a meal and time away from what we may infer is a curious, demanding crowd, members of his family come to “take charge of him.” Perhaps they are afraid that he will bring shame down upon them. People are saying that Jesus “has gone out of his mind.” In addition to performing healings and exorcisms, which indicate Jesus’ transcendence of material constraints, Jesus has presumed to lecture Pharisees and teachers of the Law on the subject of God’s Will – as if He Himself is in direct communication with God. If He has convinced disciples and others that He is in direct communication with God and He is trying to teach them how they might also communicate with God, then He has become dangerous to those who would maintain control over the religious life of Israel. And *He*, therefore, is in danger.

Teachers of the Law, because they cannot accept Jesus’ driving out demons as evidence that the strange, non-credentialed rabbi is in communication with God, argue that even if Jesus has a special capability – is able to use a kind of psychic channeling, enabling Him to drive out demons – He is probably earth-bound in a quintessential way; if His mind is operating on a spiritual plane, it is in the service of the evil spirit of the earth, Beelzebub. Jesus points out

their error: If He were in fact serving Beelzebub, His driving evil spirits out of people would show that Beelzebub is working against His own interests.

Jesus Christ entered a forbidding, dangerous world – a world in which He was bound to be misunderstood. When we appreciate the special consciousness that He taught His disciples, and continues to teach those who are His disciples today, we also appreciate the strength of Jesus's will. Operative in Jesus's will is the Will of God. It's true that the world seems to have little use for spiritual ways of knowing – for the spiritual dimension of awareness. The Apostle Paul acknowledges this in our reading from *First Corinthians* this morning, when He says, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." As disciples of Our Lord, we pray for the spiritual discernment that draws us ever upward, beyond worldly limitations.