

I wonder how many baptismal testimonies you have heard in your time that began 'I was brought up in a Christian home...'

I don't know what kind of equivalent ceremony there was in Joseph's time but if Joseph had to give some kind of testimony as a teenager explaining his faith in Yahweh – the Lord God it may have sounded similar. This is where our story begins....

Joseph was the son of Jacob, grandson of Isaac and Great-Grandson of Abraham with whom God made a covenant. He promised to bless Abraham and said that through Abraham all the nations on the earth would be blessed. This covenant was passed on to Isaac and Jacob to whom God revealed his name as Yahweh 'I am who I am'. By the time Joseph was born the Hebrews were well established as worshippers of Yahweh. And Joseph was a good Hebrew boy.

And through this time
God was with Joseph

And then Joseph's life changed.

There had always been sibling rivalry – Jacob had always favoured him – but was that his fault?

And then there were the dreams – Joseph didn't create his own dreams, or endow himself with the gift of interpretation. It was in God's hands. They were a gift from father God. But it served to fuel the brothers' jealousy.

Then the coat Joseph didn't buy the coat for himself. It was in Jacob's hands. A gift from his father. But it was the final straw.

The dreams and the coat, the coat and the dreams it simply wasn't fair. In the words of the song – 'The dreamer had to go.'

And cast into a pit, his life spared by Rueben - chance for God to intervene for Joseph to be rescued. But then taken trafficked across the border – a slave.

What had Joseph done? How had he found himself in this place?

Where was God?

But through all this
God was with Joseph

And thus Joseph had been taken from his family and from his worshipping community, the covenantal people – his church in today's language. How would he worship? How would he honour the covenant? Joseph! Son of Jacob, grandson of Isaac, great grandson of Abraham with whom God made his

covenant, through whom God promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Isolated and alone a slave in Egypt. Where was God?

But in the background there are echoes –
Leave your country and your kindred and your father's house
A land that I will show you
Through you all nations will be blessed.

So whether Joseph felt God's presence or not, he had taken God's promise of blessing with him. He alone embodied God's covenant in a foreign culture. And through Joseph, Potiphar and his household were blessed (Gen 39:5). And Potiphar recognised God's presence perhaps even if Joseph could not,

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And then perhaps when Joseph was beginning to believe that God may have come with him to Egypt disaster strikes again. There was something about Joseph, perhaps it was something about the blessing that he had brought to their house but Potiphar's wife felt it was her right to do as she pleased and to seek to seduce Joseph..... He was a slave after all – he should be at the beck and call of his owners.

It wasn't Joseph's fault – he had no power. Didn't he just have to go along with the wishes of those with the power? God had allowed him to become a slave in this place – God hadn't stepped in and rescued him so why shouldn't Joseph do as he likes? Take the line of least resistance. Try to just fit in and make the best of the situation. But although alone and isolated from God's people, with no-one to whom to be accountable, Joseph's godliness shines through. Joseph refuses to compromise refuses to sin.

And Potiphar's wife shouts rape – what defence does he have? Who will believe a foreign male slave over the woman of the house? So he ends in prison. Misrepresented, falsely accused. Did God care? Did God even know? Or was he back in Israel with his chosen ones – the one's who had each other? The ones who fitted in? Has God abandoned Joseph?

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God was with Joseph

And so he is a prisoner. And yet there is a glimmer of hope – he is in the prison where the king's prisoners are kept.
And God's promise of blessings remains on Joseph even in prison. The jailer is pleased with him and puts Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners, making him responsible for everything that was done in the prison. The jailer did not have

to look after anything for which Joseph was responsible, Joseph succeeded in everything he did. (Gen 39:21-23)

Because through all this
God was with Joseph

And then after some time he becomes the servant to the King's wine steward and chief baker...and they both have a dream. Again Joseph is endowed with the gift of interpretation and when his interpretations are proved to be correct there is hope for Joseph. The wine steward can make representation on his behalf before the king. Freedom and justice are in sight.

But the wine steward forgets him. As it seems God has forgotten him. Why give him the gift of interpretation and then just leave him languishing in prison? As time passed Joseph must have cried out to God in the way that the Psalmists were to do many years later 'How long O Lord?'

But through all this
God was with Joseph

Two long years later it is Pharaoh's turn to dream. The wine steward remembers Joseph and his gift and Joseph is summoned.

But before he enters Pharaoh's presence, he shaves. What would God's people have made of that? Was Joseph compromising his Hebrew heritage and dedication to God by breaking this Hebrew tradition and trying to fit in with Egyptian pagan culture? Would his family and community have disapproved of this as a step too far?

And yet the first thing Joseph does when he stands before the Pharaoh of that great nation is acknowledge that it is God not he who can interpret dreams.

It is not long before Pharaoh sees God in the life and works of Joseph. He declares that "We will never find a better man than Joseph, a man who has God's spirit in him." (Gen 41:38)

Because through all this
God was with Joseph

And so the story draws to a conclusion – Joseph is made in charge of the plans to avoid starvation during the famine. Egypt is blessed. The Hebrews are blessed as they are shown favour by Egypt because of Joseph. And there is personal restoration and blessing for Joseph and his family.

And was Joseph part of God's mission? There is no call of Joseph. Joseph doesn't plan to leave everything and follow God in the way that Abraham and others did. He spent most of his life away from anyone else who shared his faith. And most of the time God seemed absent.

And if Joseph was standing before us today and we asked him if he was a missionary to the Egyptians, perhaps he would laugh at us –
A missionary? I was a slave and a servant and a member of Pharaoh's staff but not a missionary.

For most of my life I didn't live amongst the Hebrews and uphold their traditions or worship Yahweh – The Lord God – with them.

I wasn't called to Egypt I just ended up there.

For most of my life God seemed hidden and only now and again did I recognise his power at work.

And yet we, as Christians living many years later, standing back as it were from a picture and taking in the whole view, we can see that God never left Joseph. God kept his promise, his covenant made through Abraham. And as Joseph remained faithful to God, even though he didn't worship in the traditional way, in a pagan culture Joseph carried God's blessing to others. Joseph embodied God's presence and in Joseph people saw Yahweh – The Lord God.

And so thousands of years later we stand in the new promise of the new covenant made through Jesus. And we may feel that we are not missionaries, that we haven't experience that call from God that some people speak about. We may feel that we have just ended up where we are for no apparent reason and that if we are honest most of the time God seems hidden.

Yet through all this
God is with us.

We may even feel disconnected from Christian culture, or may struggle to worship in a traditional way and yet within this non-Christian, post Christendom, secular society as we are faithful to God we can carry the promise of God's blessing to others. We who are called Temples of the Holy Spirit, we may embody God's presence to others.

And this is God's means of mission - sending His presence to meet people in their own culture –

For the Word – that is Jesus – became flesh and dwelt among us.

Let us be inspired by Joseph and respond to the example of Jesus and embody the presence of God wherever we are.

Amen