

**“Lessons to be learned from this Recession”**  
**Week 4: Avoiding the Bubbles and Bust Cycles of Life**  
**Texts: Genesis 41:1-40; Matthew 7:24-29**

Who will play the part of Joseph in the upcoming Andrew Lloyd Weber musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*? For the past two months my family has been glued to the TV as one by one would be Joseph bite the dust as their dream to be the next big star on London’s West End comes to an end. It was fitting that the other wannabe’s left in the competition defrocked the rejected Joseph of his dreamcoat as did Joseph’s brothers in the book of Genesis. Except this lot was a lot kinder to the musical Joseph than the brothers in Genesis, who sell Joseph into slavery to merchants in a passing caravan headed to Egypt. And to think all this misery is the result of a dream... a dream that will have Joseph languishing in prison until Pharaoh has a dream himself that demands interpretation.

In this dream Pharaoh is standing on the bank of the Nile, a fitting symbol of life that is made possible for those who can cultivate its power. The empire is dependent upon the Nile flooding every year depositing a rich layer of topsoil to grow crops. In the event that the Nile doesn’t flood, crops wither and die under the oppressive heat. So it isn’t strange at all that Pharaoh would see 7 fat cows come up from the river to be eaten by 7 gaunt and gangly cows. Joseph was correct to see that 7 years of abundance would be followed by 7 years of drought and famine. In fact, the seven lean years would be so bad that the people would soon forget the good times. Mass starvation would happen unless appropriate action is taken by the one whom the people hold responsible when the economy goes south.

In Joseph’s day it was Pharaoh. In our day it is the President of the United States. Just this week the President’s stimulus package is getting a lot of attention. What was promised as kick starting the economy hasn’t done its job to date. Supporters of the President remind people that it is too early to judge the success or failure of the stimulus. Detractors of the President point out that much of the stimulus wasn’t going to stimulate the economy because over 70% of the spending was back loaded in years two, three, and four. No wonder many on Wall Street are fearful that the green shoots of the economy are going to wither and die if unemployment continues to rise. This should not surprise anyone when you consider that consumer spending is the life blood of our economy as the Nile was for the Egyptians. We have had more than 7 years of plenty. Until this present recession, economic expansion began in 2002 after we picked up the pieces from the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. With more and more Americans owning their own homes and seeing home values go up and up and up many lived beyond their means taking out equity in their homes to finance home improvements, vacations, cars, boats, ATVS, and whatever else suited their fancy. Did you notice that the Church wasn’t in the laundry list of items people chose to splurge on. I don’t recall anyone ever saying I am going to take equity out of my house to give it to the church... unless you happen to be a member of a Mega Church in the middle of a building campaign!

Of course this bubble was going to burst as all bubbles do whether it is a housing bubble that lasted from 2002 to 2008 or a dot.com bubble that lasted from 1997 to 2001. This should give us pause to stop and think how destructive it is to develop a lifestyle predicated on riding a wave. Of course the wave is destined to crash leaving lives crushed in its wake. Warren Buffet was right to say that when the tide recedes everyone sees who has been swimming without a bathing suit. Bernie Madoff got caught skinny dipping when the money stopped coming in because investor’s pulled their money out of the market into safer investments... except Bernie hadn’t invested the money in the market. Instead, he spent it on a consumptive, conspicuous lifestyle that was obscene when you consider it wasn’t his money to begin with to act like a Robber Baron of the early 1900’s. At least, the likes of John Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie earned their money producing something of value which can not be said of Bernie.

By the way, what ever happened to the value of industry that enables a worker to earn enough to support his or her family as well as saving for that rainy day? We used to be a nation of savers before the bubble and bust cycles of the 80's, 90's, and to the present. Just after World War II and until the middle of the 1970's, we were a nation that saved at least 5 % of our earnings. Not any more... most of us live pay check to pay check... and if a tsunami were to personally hit us or our family with a loss of job or a health crisis very few of us could withstand the catastrophe.

Joseph foresaw the economic disaster coming Egypt's way and warned Pharaoh accordingly. Put someone in charge that will put away twenty percent of the grain crop in storage during the 7 years of plenty in order to feed the people during the 7 years of famine. What would our lives look like if we handle our finances as astutely as Joseph did? What message do you need to hear that will get your attention? Does Suzy Orman need to reach through the screen and grab you by the collar and say "I am talking to you... shape up... stop living beyond your means... and start saving for a rainy day."? Or do you need to get a letter from Dave Ramsey about an upcoming financial seminar to get you out of debtor's prison? Or does God have to take more drastic measures like speaking to you through the medium of a dream?

Dreams according to Carl Jung are the playground of the subconscious. Dreams are useful in helping the subconscious realm speak to the conscious realm, albeit in symbolic ways whose meaning is often hidden from us. If only we had a key to decipher the code. If only there was someone who could interpret dreams as Joseph did for Pharaoh, maybe we could make sense of those reoccurring dreams that keep us awake at night. Like Joseph, I have discovered that I have a gift for interpreting dreams. With those whom I give spiritual direction as a Spiritual Director, I ask them to keep a dream journal. Write down every dream you can remember. I say this because I want to know how God is at work at the unconscious level to move them toward wholeness and integration.

Believe it or not, it is the function of dreams to take the events of our day life and put them into a holistic pattern... to gain proper closure if you will. On those days when something is unresolved, usually we will have an active night of dreams. It is as though God has hardwired our brain for wholeness that we might be whole and holy as God is. So, if you can get the conscious realm to work in harmony with the unconscious realm resolution occurs.

In other words, we are not destined to follow the same script that has us on a roller coaster ride of dramatic ups and downs. Pharaoh followed a different script and so can we. We need not listen to those authority figures in childhood that told us that we were less than... because of this or that. And the resulting strategies to overcome the hurt or mask the hurt can be jettisoned out of our subconscious tape recorder. We can pop in a new tape and listen to what Jesus thinks about us. We can read the Sermon on the Mount and discover that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We can read on and discover that just as God cares for the sparrow, God cares for you and me... so we do not have to worry about what we will eat or wear or earn for God knows your needs.

I realize that learning to trust God radically is hard for all of us but especially for those whose trust has been betrayed by an authority figure like a parent or a teacher or a pastor or a coach. It is kind of like the old Ole joke when Ole is taking a walk and suddenly walks off the trail and plunges over the ravine. Lucky for Ole he catches himself on a bush that is growing out from the side of the cliff. Below Ole is a drop of over 100 feet to his certain death. Above Ole is the face of the cliff which is insurmountable. The only way out is for Ole to yell for help. So Ole starts yelling and he hears this voice. "Ole, this is God talking. Let go and trust me to save you." Ole thinks about this for a moment and then says, "Is there anyone else out there who can help me?"

Is this not our experience as well? In the trust department God is the last person we turn to... not the first. And the reason is this... intuitively we know that to trust God means a precipitous fall to our death. It is what depth psychology calls the death of our false self. To die to this way of life...even if we are religious... means throwing out the old tapes that have us believing a lie... that we are only worth something unless we have wealth... whether it be money in the bank... or we bank on our good looks... or what ever we have to do so that others will see we are people of worth.

But the truth is that we are of infinite worth not because of what we do in this world. We are of infinite worth by virtue of who we are in God's eyes. At baptism God call us beloved. You are my beloved son or daughter with whom I am well pleased.

Before Jesus performed any miracle, before he exorcised any demon, before he preached any sermon, God said to Jesus, "You are my beloved son with whom I am well pleased." This is the script all of us need to get into our heads. We are loved unconditionally by God. This gives us the courage to be... to be that beloved son or daughter who discovers that the key in life is not what you produce or consume but rather in what you give and receive. To live life as a beloved child of God is to listen to the words of Jesus. It is liken to building a foundation on solid rock so that when the storms of life come our way... we will not be washed away as well. Truly Christ is the solid rock on which we stand and everything else is sinking sand. Hear the words of Jesus anew to avoid the bubble and bust cycles of life:

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock."

Let our faith be founded on such a rock. And by the way you might like to know that God is still looking for people in this world who will follow the script of Joseph. Andrew Lloyd Weber is not the only one looking for the right person to entrust his kingdom to... so is God... except this part doesn't last for a season on the West End. Instead, it lasts a whole lifetime for the person who will be a good steward to all that God has entrusted to him or to her. So are you ready for a new script that has the power to deliver you from the bubble and bust cycles of life? I hope so... I pray so... in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.