

The Second Greatest Day of Your Life

By Rev. Sheryl Stewart

Genesis 45: 1-15

Romans 11: 1-2 (a), 29-32

Matthew 15: 21-28

Psalm 133

Summary: One: the day you are born. Two: the day you discover why. Today, we stand with Joseph and Jesus on this second day and are assured God has made a day for us in His grace as well.

I wish I had the kind of memory which would let me tell you who originally expressed this idea about the greatest days in our lives, but the idea has some merit, especially as I take this second day as being the same one as the day we claim God's saving grace.

When I spoke of Jacob a couple weeks ago, I also mentioned Joseph as an example of times which seem unfair and to no good purpose but which actually work out to do amazing and good things, not only for that person, but for many. Joseph's hard life led him to a time when he could act to save God's people from a terrible famine and preserve a remnant which would lead to the birth of Jesus. From Jesus will come the salvation of the Jews and spread out to bless us all.

Today's lectionary passage records the moment Joseph accepts and confesses his life purpose as a living part of God's plan of salvation. He accepts his dreams as God's Word and confesses them with his lips, the two requirements of

salvation. Thus, the day Joseph knows why he is born is also the day in which he is saved.

That brings me to a major doctrinal issue. Jesus is fully divine and fully human, all at once. He astounds scholars of the scriptures from an incredibly young age with His questions. That reality alone shows that Jesus is a spiritual prodigy, but He still has questions. He still needs to learn and grow. This limitation is essential if He is to be fully human, and therefore Jesus also has his day of amazing grace.

It is obvious that Jesus knew and accepted, from a very young age, the fact that He was born to die and that the purpose of His life and death was for the salvation of God's people, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. To tie up a loose end, let me remind you that Jacob's name becomes Israel at the river Jabbok when he wrestles with God and prevails. The stories of Jacob, Joseph, and Jesus are linked, as is every life in God's Plan.

However profound Jesus' self-knowledge was, He had not yet grasped the universal aspect of His purpose until this encounter with the amazingly persistent and remarkably humble Samaritan woman advocating for His help with her sick daughter. His disciples are annoyed by her pestering appeals. Finally, Jesus

Himself tells her that his attention must be elsewhere: to the lost sheep of Israel, not to Samaritans.

She knows Jews are not supposed to have dealing with Samaritans. She knows her people are considered heretics and enemies. Jews should not talk to them, help them, or accept help from them. Remarkably, she persists in the face of Jesus' understandable refusal and uses His own insult to remind Him, "Even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

She, thus, confesses Jesus as her master. Obviously, this is the second greatest day of her life. This very moment also becomes Jesus' own second greatest day. He acknowledges her faith and performs the healing she has requested! His knowledge of why He was born human -- despite being divine -- has just undergone a quantum leap from being sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel to being sent to all lost sheep, everywhere. I believe this moment shows Jesus' own salvation, completed on the Cross as He says, Father, forgive them."

Why were you born, and what is the purpose of your life? Every one of us -- from suffering heroes like Abraham and, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, Eve, Deborah, Ruth, Queen Esther, Job or even Judas -- are part of God's Plan. Even the most obscure lives -- Cain and his brother, Able, a madman among the Gerasenes, an unnamed Samaritan woman at a well, an honest man born blind,

nine lepers by the roadside, a tortured thief dying beside Jesus – these are all part of God’s Salvation history.

We are part of the same story. Our knowledge is imperfect, but Jesus shows us that perfection is coming. There is, has been, or will be such a day – the second greatest day – for each of us. And the third greatest day will dawn as promised in a hymn: “But purer and higher, and greater will be our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see!” Amen.