

## **Sold into Slavery Sunday,9/20/20**

I believe you all know Tigger from Winnie the Pooh- that's T-I- double "Guh"-er. But how many of you know the song about Tigger? It goes something like this:

The wonderful thing about Tiggers  
Is Tiggers are wonderful things!  
Their tops are made out of rubber  
Their bottoms are made out of springs!  
They're bouncy, trouncy, flouncy, pouncy  
Fun, fun, fun, fun, fun!  
But the most wonderful thing about Tiggers is  
I'm the only one! Yes, I'm the only one!

Don't worry, while I may be a little corona-crazy, we will be looking at the life of Joseph, but it was Tigger that I first thought of when I imagined what resilience looks like. Tigger is capable of being sad, but never for very long. He chooses to be fun, and so he is!

By contrast, Eeyore the sad donkey is the opposite of resilient. He's downright down about everything and he starts every day with that predisposition. "Good morning, Pooh Bear," Eeyore would say quite gloomily. "If it is a good morning, which I doubt." Eeyore's sad little leaky stick house that he sits under in the rain is a metaphor for a problem that runs deeper for Eeyore. Not only does Eeyore let circumstances drive his attitudes in life, he doesn't even need difficult circumstances to set him off. He's permanently stuck in the mud, and definitely not "bouncy, trouncy, flouncy, pouncy," or fun!

So which one are you more like? Tigger or Eeyore? I'd call myself a recovering Eeyore, by the grace of God. How about you? Which one would you rather be?

In most ways, the Joseph who we met in our first Bible reading seemed quite a bit like Tigger to me, and not in all the good ways. You see, just like Tigger, Joseph had a tendency to bounce around and generate trouble with his siblings when he was younger. He apparently never stopped to consider how his words, and the preferential treatment he received from his father, affected his brothers. Unfortunately for Joseph, those years of accumulated ill-will eventually came to a head, as we hear in our continuation of the story in Genesis 37.

{Read Genesis 37:12-13, 18-26, 36, NLT}

That story may have become a little too familiar to us over the years, so I invite you to experience the shock of the violence and loss that Joseph experienced. This was no crime of passion, but a calculated act of cruelty. His brothers began plotting his murder, and the cover-up, before Joseph had even arrived on the scene. Their motive was base jealousy. Their first act was one of humiliation, tearing off the colorful robe that represented Jacobs special love for Joseph and leaving him naked, vulnerable to harm in the absence of his father's protection. I wonder what Joseph might have been thinking and feeling at this point? Maybe he thought he was going to be in for a brotherly beating, perhaps not for the first time. But surely he couldn't have seen what was coming. Instead of ascending to a position of power over his brothers, he found himself descending to the bottom of an empty well, most likely sitting in shock, contemplating his inevitable death by starvation, thirst, or exposure as his brothers callously ate their lunch near the top of the well. What a difference an hour, or even less than a minute, can make in our lives. Can you even begin to imagine his shock, anger, fear, and sadness?

I hope your siblings have never turned on you in such a dramatic fashion, but I'll bet all of us could think of several pivotal moments in our lives when we've experienced a sudden reversal of fortune. Some of those things remain seared into our memory, impossible to forget. I can remember vividly a variety of car accidents- the sounds, sights, and feelings that happened in a matter of seconds, and then the lingering shock in the aftermath of car parts on the pavement. I remember the details of where I was and the words I heard when I learned that my brother had lost his leg in a motorcycle accident, and my oldest sister was diagnosed with breast cancer, an unrelenting disease that would later claim her life. Your moments may have been different: a job loss; the death of a spouse, parent, or child; maybe something tied up with the current pandemic.

Can you remember a time like Joseph was having, sitting at the bottom of a well and thinking that your life was about to come to a sudden, surprising, and disappointing conclusion, either physically, socially, emotionally, or all three? Maybe that's where you're at even today, hurting and feeling hopeless. The good news that the life of Joseph has to offer us isn't some bit of trite wisdom like, "This, too, shall pass." Sadly, it didn't just "pass" for Joseph. He actually came out of the frying pan into the fire, having been hauled

back out of the well by his brothers, only to be sold into slavery. No, the good news is that somehow, amazingly, Joseph not only survived this and the subsequent ordeals in his life, but he actually thrived. Somehow Joseph found a way to bounce back like a Tigger instead of sulking around like an Eeyore. What was his secret?

You might be surprised that in this early part of Joseph's story, the secret to his resilience has less to do with his actions and attitudes and more to do with God's plan for redeeming creation. I know how deeply counter-cultural that idea seems today- relying on God- but there it is in Scripture for us to read. Joseph was sold by the Midianite traders to Potiphar, an officer of the Pharaoh of Egypt and the captain of the palace guard. As we'll read in subsequent chapters in Exodus, this turns out to set the stage for Joseph's ascendancy, but Joseph could hardly have known that, and there was plenty more adversity in store for him. No, there was no amount of giftedness or cleverness that started the bounce back for Joseph. Even before Jesus was born to save us from our sins, God was already at work bringing redemption out of sin.

How can that help us? We're living in an age of videos and programs to be our best selves. We're told we have ideal body weights and muscle tone, we're encouraged to optimize plans for what we eat and how we spend our time and money, and no matter what dilemma it is we face when our plans are frustrated, Google has a never ending list of suggestions for how we can fix it. The problem is that not everything can be fixed, because we have profound limits on what we can control and what we know. In other words, we tend to live our daily lives as if we had no need for God! Joseph's sudden journey from favored son to slave reminds us of our human limits, but it also reminds us that Joseph didn't take that journey alone. God walked with Joseph on every step of that journey, and while it wasn't a road paved with gold, already God was at work, redeeming the evil offered by Joseph's brothers for the good of all God's people.

I hope you're curious to see how that happens! Your homework for next week is to pick up your Bible and read some of Joseph's story. Read Chapter 37 if you haven't already to review how it all began, and read chapter 39 to prepare for worship next Sunday. Hearing the Word of God is good, but reading it is also good, and repetition is a key to planting God's Word in your heart. In fact, hearing and reading God's Word is a basic way to build

your resilience by increasing your knowledge of God's character and will. I suggest reading it aloud with someone else if you have that option, sharing in the reading, struggling with the names together, and wondering together what it all means.

Do you remember the farmer and the donkey? We're the donkey in that story, aren't we? There's seemingly no end to the amount of dirt falling on our backs. We can't stop the dirt from flying, but we can choose to shake it off and take a step up. You can do that today by taking even one tangible step forward in your faith. Read one chapter in your Bible. Pray for five minutes. Talk to one person about your faith and your struggles. You don't have to have it all figured out. In fact, you probably can't. But you can put your faith in God and take one step forward.

Please take a minute now to reflect on what Joseph's example can teach you today. If you like, you can share a comment or a prayer on Facebook.



**Bill Reinhart, Pastor**  
pastorbill@buffaloumc.com