

Genesis 41:41-49. ⁴¹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." ⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³ He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. ⁴⁴ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." ⁴⁵ Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt. ⁴⁶ Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. ⁴⁷ During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. ⁴⁸ Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. ⁴⁹ Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.

Pause and consider what the Lord has done.

1. Recognize his abundant goodness.

2. Trust in his abundant care.

7 good years, 7 years of abundance, just like Joseph had said, just like God had promised, and the storehouses were bursting. Each city blessed. Each field harvested 7 times and the bounty stored away so that God could provide for the people and preserve his chosen. And it all happened in the land of Joseph's suffering.

Pause and consider what God was doing for Joseph. Roughly 13 years before, at the age of 17, Joseph was stripped of his special coat, humiliated by his brothers, and sold into slavery. Now at the age of 30 he was suddenly dressed in robes of fine linen and honored by many. He wore a gold chain around his neck and was given a ring of authority to put on his finger while he rode in the Pharaoh's chariot so that everyone would know of his noble status. No longer was Joseph ignored and his words rejected as useless and foolish but people listened to his every word and followed his every command. And in this obvious state of exaltation Joseph simply went about his business. He went throughout the land to do the work that God had given him through the Pharaoh. Joseph did not let the things of the past and the challenges of the present or the troubles of the future keep him from serving his Lord. Instead he went about his work surrounded by blessings and trusting in God's promises.

God had kept and would continue to keep his promises. God had promised a period of 7 good (or fat years) during which he would pour out abundant blessings upon the land of Egypt. Joseph went out during those 7 years and collected the grain that God brought forth from the land. And now before the Bible records the 7 years of famine (or lean years) that

were to follow, God led his inspired writer to pause for a moment and consider the blessings that God had brought forth. First of all, what tremendous blessings God had shown to Joseph! What a magnificent turnaround in his personal life! From slave to second in command of a mighty nation! Praise be to God! Secondly, what huge quantities of food that God had supplied not only for the people of Egypt but for the people of many nations including his chosen people Israel. What remarkable abundance! This was not just a string of good fortune, or some natural phenomenon; this was the miraculous work of the Almighty hand of God! Pause and consider what great things the Lord had done. Grain was so plentiful it was like the sand of the sea. 7 years of barn bursting abundance, and the grain that was collected and stored away was only a portion of the grain that was produced during those 7 years of bounty. It was so much that it was beyond measure; that they couldn't keep records of it any more. Pause and consider what great things the Lord had done!

Pause and consider what great things God has done for you. We don't do that nearly as much as we should; do we? Instead what do we, as human beings, do? Without giving it much thought we enjoy, we indulge, often without a word of thanks or an acknowledgement of God's blessings. And more than just occasionally when we look ahead to the future we fret and we wonder and we may even become anxious and worried and we may even panic. We might see nothing but obstacles and challenges and shortcomings and we forget to take into account the gracious hand of God that is capable of such wonderful, bountiful, miraculous things.

Dear friends let us pause and give thanks for the wonders that God has done for us. He has saved us from slavery to sin. He has exalted us who were once humbled and imprisoned by sin and he has called us to a place of honor. He has made us citizens of heaven and part of his royal priesthood of believers. He gives us the privilege and honor of working in his kingdom. God has promised that we will reign with him in heaven and he will watch over us and provide for us as we walk this earth. Consider the abundance of his kindness. Our gracious God forgives us our sins and gives us our daily bread. We have all that we need for our daily life and then some. And to top it all off we have the promise of eternal, never-ending, countless blessings in heaven through faith in Jesus Christ! How richly blessed we are! How generous and abundant the love of our God is!

Some things came up this week in our congregation that have made me pause and give thanks for the blessings that God has poured on us as a body of believers. This past week a meeting was held in which leadership from each of our four area WELS congregations discussed the future of ministry in this area. We talked about the possibility of seeing some lean years, but happily and primarily we talked about the blessings that God has showered upon his believers. We talked frankly about the financial challenges that face each of our congregations. We were honest about the shortcomings, but we also were able to discuss the many blessings that we have seen as individual congregations as well as collectively in joint ministry. In the past 7 years, these 4 WELS churches along this strip of the Minnesota prairie have joined together and the Lord has done some wonderful things through us and for us.

Pause and consider what God has done for us as an individual congregation. In the past 7 years our congregation has been blessed with several generous memorials, *we have improved upon our building, re-formed our choir, and rebuilt the Sunday School program. In the last 7 years we have been blessed as the sound of little voices has returned to our back pews. We have rejoiced together at weddings and baptisms and confirmations. (Insert your church blessings here).*

But the blessings of gospel ministry have gone beyond the walls of this church as we have partnered with the churches around us to do some productive and exciting things. The 212 Teens for Christ, our area youth group, has been bolstered by the joint ministry and has seen the blessing of steady attendance. We have been able to come together regularly for bible study and we were able to participate in 2 international youth rallies. In the past 7 years the congregations in this area have been able to work together to hold a soccer camp for the children of this community. At its beginning God blessed this camp with 64 children and through the course of 7 years that number has increased by 30. 94 children came to our camp this year. Pause and consider what great things God has done! And of course we are about to embark on a joint ministry of Little Lambs Learning Center. Here 20 children, from the surrounding communities have been enrolled in our learning center, and others have shown interest. And in this place, God-willing, these children will be able to hear God's Word on a daily and a year round basis.

These past seven years may have been a bit lean as far as the some of the raw statistics that our area churches might report, but what great blessings the Lord has poured out on his people throughout this area. The Lord has blessed us beyond the sheer numbers, beyond what any record book could keep track of, indeed we have been blessed.

Each community, and each congregation, has been blessed with their own storehouse of blessings and resources. God be praised! And so at the meeting this past Wednesday we talked about how we could share such blessings to effectively continue the work of the gospel in this area. The idea of sharing two ministers for the four congregations and the blessings and challenges this would entail was a topic that was discussed. We are still very much in the beginning stages of this conversation, and this process might take a while to sort through. It may look completely different than our first reports it may be about the same, but when you hear about such meetings, please do not think the worst. Do not jump to the worst conclusions and spread thoughts of gloom and doom and the end of congregational life as we know it. Consider the challenges, but do not be paralyzed by them, do not stare at them and press your nose up against them so that you can't see beyond them. Instead pause, take a step back, and consider what the Lord has done. Consider the challenges, but then think about, pray about the possibilities, consider what things would be like if we could join together and not be so burdened, or so conscious of, or so limited by the funds, or the manpower, or the resources, that we do or do not have. Think about how we could work together to share God's Word throughout the Hwy 212 corridor and beyond. Think about the wonderful and amazing things that our God has already been doing through us, the miraculous things he is capable of doing in the future, and how he wants us to be a

part of his glorious gospel work. Think about it, and pray about, and trust that God will lead us in the right direction.

And of course this is what God wants us to do with all our troubles - come to him first. Many times we are like those disciples looking at that crowd of 5000+ people and we can't see beyond the lack of resources. How can this ever work? How can we even approach this task? Even though the Savior is right here with us through faith we also have our doubts. We cave into worry and trouble and anxiety. And then worse than being short on resources we are short on trust and we lack faith. But what does our Savior teach his disciples? What does he teach us through the account of Joseph and the miraculous feeding of the 5000? Trust in your gracious God of abundant power and love, and bring your problems to Jesus first. He is always willing to hear our plea and lend you his almighty hand. **"Bring them here to me."** Jesus said to those first disciples. Bring them here to me he says to us today. Let us bring our problems to Jesus and put our trust in his gracious and abundant care.

When you are worried and troubled by the problems of your personal life, or the issues that face your community, or the issues that face your congregation, think about Joseph and how God provided for him and so richly blessed a young man who had suffered so much. Think of how he blessed Joseph and the whole land and how God blessed many more communities and countries through him. Think about how these miraculous events that took place during Joseph's life and how they took place because God in his love had a plan to preserve his people so that he could send a Savior for you and me, for people in this community, and throughout the world. Pause and consider this amazing love of our God. Fall before your compassionate Savior and lay your troubles at his feet. Bring them here to Jesus.

As Joseph went from town to town gathering the grain, he knew what the next 7 years would bring; we do not. God has not given us a dream or a vision that clues us in on how things will go. All we can do is go about the business that God has given while trusting in his promises. It might not look like the work that we envisioned, but like Joseph, we entrust ourselves to that task. For we trust the Lord who is abundant in his goodness and abundant in his care. Even in the midst of this world, this land of suffering and sin, we trust in the LORD. For our faithful God promises to watch over us and provide for us. The Lord in his abundant goodness gives us even more than we need. And who knows, the Lord may have miracle of sorts in store for us. Perhaps he will raise up more cheerful givers. Perhaps evangelism seeds planted will begin to grow all at once and God will rapidly add to his kingdom in this area. We don't know exactly what the future will bring, but we know that we have God who is so gracious and so powerful and he can do such miraculous things.

And so we give thanks, we look forward, and while we are not completely certain if we are heading into some lean years or years of abundance may the Lord remind us of the countless blessings with which he continually surrounds us. May he keep us from being so focused on our struggles and our sufferings that we overlook how much he has richly blessed us and all the different ways that he may bless us still! Let us pause and consider the great things that our God has done and the great things that he is able to do among us. Amen.