

Sermon 24.11.10

Kate Heinzl, pastor with Sally Minnich, violinist

Genesis 41: 25, 28-41, 46

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.

...It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?' So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you.' And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt'...Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Sermon outline:

## KATE

Dissonance: a tension or clash resulting from the combination of two or more disharmonious or unsuitable elements. the clash of things that don't seem like they belong together.

Post-election Sunday. Sally and I met on election day to plan, wondering what we'd know on Sunday. We recognized that across our country, and here in our community as well - there would be some sitting in pews jubilant, or relieved, and others of the faithful fearful, mourning the results.

I asked Sally to explore dissonance with me. We know it, we feel the tension in our bodies, we hear the clashing all around us.

So today we explore Holy Dissonance - using it as a lens to understand the times we live in, a lens through which to explore Joseph's story, and seeing if there's something we might take into our daily living as followers of Christ

Dissonance = Tension, clashing, when 2 or more unsuitable elements are combined.

## SALLY: Demonstrate on Violin

- Example A

Kate - Hear it?      Have you felt it this week?      Do you notice it in the Joseph story?

It's in our stories too.

Dissonance, as uncomfortable as it may be at times, is a reality, and it's necessary. That gives me hope.

Dissonance is needed.

Dissonance makes a story, every story, not just a happy cat video. The stories worth telling rely on dissonance. The reality, and necessity of dissonance, gives story and song meaning.

## MEANING - Demonstrate on violin

## SALLY

- Example B. Just play it strictly in time and at one dynamic.

Sally shares these ideas - Without dissonance, there is no resolution. Without dissonance, the consonance is just nice sound, devoid of context... devoid of meaning.

To draw an analogy between music and life, I suppose God is the composer (whether by divine plan or an allowance for free will and its repercussions). We are then the performers; active agents in bringing about the plan and finding meaning. ...

In music, when performers encounter dissonance we:

First tempted to hurry through/avoid/even change to consonance (demo 8ve or Maj 7th leap)

When I work with my students... hear... expect...Finally...

the discipline required to maximize the music's impact. (More often than not)great artists will emphasize the *dissonant* moments; we stretch the musical time for but a moment, we crescendo into it, hold it, lean into the dissonance, at last relaxing into the resolution.

- Example B again, but with the artistic emphasis as just described

**Kate:** As I think about dissonance in stories, and specifically in the story of Joseph, I hear dissonance followed by mini-resolutions over and over. There's a feeling that things aren't as dire as they seemed, and then a movement into more dissonance (again, dissonance being the tension of two elements that don't seem to go together.)

Joseph first appears in Genesis as a 17 year old, telling his older brothers, and his father, about dreams of his greatness and their subservience to him. Not a very skillful interaction - getting him thrown into a pit, sold into slavery and eventually landing him in prison.

Even after correctly interpreting the dreams of the baker and cup-bearer, fellow prisoners, he spends another 2 long years in prison, with no hope in sight...

Then... we get a glimmer of real resolution - Pharaoh has a dream no one in his inner circle can interpret.

We feel it coming - there's hope for something that feels (WHAT'S THE WORD?)

The cup-bearer finally remembers the dude in prison. Joseph is cleaned up and brought before Pharaoh.

Our story today has a sense of resolution. The dreams are understood and a plan is put in place.

But, life continues...jo knew that

One thing I've noticed about Joseph in this story is his ability to stay relationally present - he must have been in tune to the various relationships as a slave in Potiphar's household to have risen to leadership. The scripture says, over and over, that the LORD was with Joseph. Joseph has learned how to create harmony, even in these hard circumstances.

And then in prison he continues to relate to those around him.

It's there that one morning he notices two other prisoners are troubled looking, asking 'why are your faces downcast today?'

Instead of being crushed by his circumstances of imprisonment, Joseph stays engaged. Stays present to the thoughts, feelings and the needs of those around him.

Joseph has the ability to be in hard spaces and stay relationally present. That feels like an act of holy dissonance.

I realized that Joseph must be maintaining relationships with the very people who are part of the system that enslaved him. (i.e. the prison guard). To me, this just seems so relevant to the election outcome this week. Joseph stays related in the dissonance of the moment, no matter the circumstances.

What does music have to say about dissonance and staying related to what's going on?

**Sally** - Dissonance requires relationship (more than 1 note needed).

Demonstrate on violin:

- single note (A)... then double stop (A and G: minor 7th)

*“Notice how as we get closer to the perfect 8ve, the dissonance increases”*

- Example C.

Gradient of dissonance - closer to perfect interval the harsher - same with people!

There are colloquial phrases we throw out- things like “live in harmony” (meaning, without conflict... without dissonance.) But here's the thing- Dissonance *is* harmony. They aren't opposites at all.

Without relationship, there is no dissonance. And dare I ask- without dissonance, can there be a relationship?

**Kate:**

There's so much happening in the Joseph story that we don't hear about - what relationships sustained Joseph? While he made life prosperous for those in Potiphar's household, and again in prison, I wonder if he had relationships that were pleasing, bringing him delight. Was his faith, a relationship with God, spiritually sustaining? How about his trust that those dreams given to him as a teenager were from God and would eventually bear fruit?

I hear you saying, Sally, that harmony holds both consonance, notes playing together that sound pleasing, and dissonance - those that are hard to stay with. For Joseph he must have had moments of connection, consonance, to stay engaged with others. For us, might it be like staying engaged and present with the challenging brother-in-law at the Thanksgiving table? AND having those around us with whom relationship is more nourishing. We need both.

What's another idea around dissonance that you've been thinking about this week?

**Sally:** Dissonance is directional: an agent of change

Composers often place dissonance in music to create a feeling of instability; an impetus to go forward to a new place. The appearance of dissonance creates the longing for resolution. Imagine a story with no conflict. This necessary element of dissonance is the agent of change from which the story flows.

**Kate:** We likely wouldn't know about Joseph if there wasn't dissonance.

Joseph wasn't very skillful at dissonance early in the story - he pissed his brothers off by telling them his dreams of power over them. But he must have changed and that allows for flow and something new to occur. Is that what you mean?

**Sally:** Demonstrate on violin:

- Example D. First arp with chordal variations *"It's nice, but it doesn't go anywhere"*
- Example D. Continue on in similar arps with chord changes, highlighting the dissonance and motion

**Kate:** I find hope in the idea that when we change just one note, we change the sound, and change the song.

That's what Holy Dissonance is - changing one note; one way of interacting. Staying present to the one we rub against, leaning into the discomfort with grace, without trying to resolve it too quickly.

Is this what Joseph did? God gave Joseph the gift to stay present - allowing him to listen closely to Pharaoh and create amazing, life giving change, across their world.

Dissonance. Holy dissonance - just changing one thing; one way of interacting.

We want to hear it, and practice what it means to live into it together.

**Sally:** leads us through the MIDI recording, hearing places of dissonance and resolution. Prior to the recording playing, show:

- Arrows showing musical movement- notice how often it's but one voice that moves
- Orange shows the pairs of notes that are in conflict

Invites us all to sing. (Joyce comes up and gives us our starting pitches, then plays along).

**Kate:**

how might you lean into the holy dissonance in your relationships?

What does this act of holy dissonance invite you towards?

Kyrie, #147 - We sing, "Lord have mercy"

Trust it is so, this grace of mercy, moving into a time of seeing God at work in our lives, this flows directly into slide show (after a bit of silence).