

Wednesday in Lent 4 2020
By Faith Joseph
Hebrews 11:22

"By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. "

The first book of Moses ends with the burial of Joseph. It is obvious from these last verses that this is only a beginning, the Genesis (if you will), of yet another story.

Joseph lived a full life, serving 80 years as the advisor to Pharaoh of Egypt, and living to a ripe old age of 110. But, his life and faith look **forward**, not backward. As Pharaoh's right-hand man in Egypt, Joseph could have been buried in elegant fashion, and with much to be remembered for, but instead he makes his sons swear an oath to carry his bones up from Egypt to the Promised Land, because "God will surely visit you." (Gen 50:25)

One of the details in the story in Genesis is that Joseph's body is embalmed. That means his body is preserved like the ancient mummies in the Egyptian tradition, which means **Joseph's body was preserved for a very long journey.**

After crossing through the Red sea, you may recall the children of Israel had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. The Bible tells us the children of Israel faithfully carried Joseph's bones for those 40 years until they reached the Promised Land. Joseph always knew his resting place was **not** in Egypt. He was a visionary for his own family and for all the children of Israel. And his vision was granted by the promise of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Jos 24:32)

The story of Joseph teaches us that faith is ever looking **forward** to the future, and it always does so on the **basis of God's Word.** I've noticed a

trend lately. Funerals are commonly referred to “celebrations of life.” That is a reflection of the secular times in which we live. Secular funerals today look backwards to memories and the past, and not forward. There’s a reason for that -- people who die without faith have no life in heaven to look forward to after death. Yes, Christian funerals look backwards and forward. They treasure the memories but they sing of the hope that is yet to come. Faith looks **forward** to the future. It hears the promise of God and then makes its plans accordingly.

When Jacob died, he made his sons swear to him that he would be buried in the land of Canaan, not in the land of Egypt. In faith, Joseph knew a time was coming when God would visit his people and lead them up out of Egypt.

One of the consistent themes of our reading in Hebrews chapter 11 is that faith is always looks to the future, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (He 11:1)." This means faith is only casually glancing at the past but is **intensely** looking to the future.

Now, that's easy to say when you are young. When you are young you are always looking to the future. Right? You can't wait until you next birthday. You want to get older as soon as possible so you can do the things others get to do: drive the car, go to your first communion, shave your first whiskers, go on your first date and then head off to college. The future is wide open when you are young!

But then you settle down. All those difficult decisions, such as who to marry, where to live, and what to do with your life start to fade in the rear-view mirror of life.

But your life isn't over yet. Your future is still wide open! Like Joseph who made plans for his bones and where they would be laid to rest, so we,

too, can't stop thinking about our future, because God has made us a **promise**. That promise is the new heavens and the new earth that will be revealed on the last day. That promise is everlasting life.

So, how do you confess that hope in your life? Allow me ask you some questions. Do you have a Christian preamble to your will? Do you have Scripture verses and Christian hymns of substance chosen for your funeral? Do you know where your children will lay your bones to rest? Have you made provisions for your children's children so that your memory will live on in them? Even in your parting gifts, your faith can be seen. You want them to be encouraged in the Christian faith, because that is the most important thing in your life, and in theirs as well. You want them to remember you, to be sure! But you want them to remember **Jesus** who suffered and died for them for the forgiveness of their sins, and rose again, to give them the hope of everlasting life.

Joseph made his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, promise him that they would carry up his bones from Egypt. Joseph wanted his two sons and all the children of Israel to be encouraged in their grief. He wanted them to keep on looking to the future in faith. He wanted them to remember not just his life ... but the life that was yet to come, for God's promise would sustain them. And His promise would come to pass. So, too, we should leave final instructions for our children that will testify to the promises of God, so that they too will be encouraged in their Christian faith!

There is something else you should know about Joseph. He is the first of many generations that do not hear directly from the God of Israel. God spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which is why He is called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was to them the promise of land, descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky and a Savior who would

come from their own bodies was spoken. But Joseph and the generations that come after him, until the days of Moses, are those who go without any direct revelations from God. All they have is a **promise** spoken long, long ago.

God spoke directly to Abraham on several occasions. Isaac also personally received the promise of God. God would also appear to Jacob. The Lord would famously wrestle with Jacob in the night and change his name to Israel and then God would repeat the promise to him.

There are no stories like this in the life of Joseph. God never spoke to him directly like God spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But his father Jacob told him of the promise God had spoken to his father Isaac and to his grandfather Abraham. He told him of that night when the angel of the Lord wrestled with him and changed his name to Israel. Joseph, in turn, told these stories to his children and to his children's children to the second and third generations. And that was the only connection the whole nation of Israel would have to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

I mention this to you because we are just like the generations that came after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We only have the promises of God in the written Bible. We tell those stories written there for us and tell everyone about Jesus because we too want our children, and our children's children to cling to the promise. For our death is not the end of our life, nor is it the end of the promise. We are always looking to the future when God will fulfil the word He has spoken to us.

The apostle Peter once warned the church that there will be those who give up on this promise. And they will invite you to do the same. He writes, "Scoffers will come in the last days ... They will say, "Where is the promise

of His coming? Forever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation (2 Pe 3:3)."

Which is why St. Peter continues with these words,

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.... But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (II Pt 3:3b-13)

God will keep his promise. So, let us keep the faith, faith not only for ourselves ... but faith for our children, and our children's children. Our bones will speak from the grave that there is hope even beyond this life. They will say that God has promised a new heavens and a new earth the home of righteousness!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.