

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
October 17, 2010**

***The Sixth Commandment
Genesis 39:1-10***

Filling The Roles

- 1. Casting Characters**
- 2. Satan's Progression**
- 3. Joseph's Rebuke**
- 4. God's Help**

Hymns: 235 – 601

Distribution: 503 – 349

Closing: *O Give Us Homes*

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

As you flip through the pages of the Old Testament, you come across stories that sometimes seem like they are perfect fits for the silver screen. Noah and the flood, David and Goliath, the 10 Plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea. It seems Hollywood directors would agree, as each of those true Biblical stories have been adapted to the big screen with varying amounts of truth and success. The true, factual account of Joseph and his up and down adventure from the cistern of Canaan to the ruler of Egypt is another one of those stories. It has been made into a musical performed on stages from grade schools to Broadway. Our job today is to do the casting for one of the scenes of that story. More personally, it is to cast yourself into the story. The trick is that you have to align yourself with the character that most closely resembles who you are. Let's begin by reading the script and introducing the characters.

“Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From

the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he refused. “With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.”

So we have two possible characters for you to play. The first is Joseph. This would probably be described as an “A” role. Joseph really seemed to have things together, didn't he? From previous chapters of Genesis, we know that he was the favorite of the 12 sons of Jacob. He had been given the coat of many colors. He was allowed to live freely in the comfort of his father's house while his brothers worked in the fields. Sure, he may have lacked some humility, but when his brothers mistreated him and threw him in the cistern and sold him as a slave, Joseph accepted his humble role. He worked hard as a slave. He trusted that God had a plan for his life. He kept a positive attitude through all the misfortune. He had the blessings of God with him in all he did. He was a good-looking, smart 18-year old man, who was well-thought of by his boss and moving up in the fast paced, heathen culture of ancient Egypt. In many ways, the world was about to be at his fingertips. In the scene we are looking at, we see the first of what was no doubt many temptations that would come his way. But, he was able to thwart it off and witness his faith knowing that his service to God was far more important than the pleasures of this world. He stood strong in spite of the evils around him.

The other role might not be so attractive. This character is a woman we know only by the title of Potiphar's wife. She also has a lot going for her.

She is married to a powerful man in the most powerful of nations, Egypt. She has all the comforts of life: fancy clothes, lavish meals, servants who do her bidding. She has everything that she could seemingly want in life. But it isn't enough for her. She had become ungrateful of her role and all the blessings she had been given. She allowed her eyes to casually wander away from her husband. Maybe she thought it was harmless, maybe she felt neglected, maybe she was bored, maybe she felt entitled, whatever it was, she surely would have had an excuse as to why this wasn't her fault or it wasn't that big of a deal. But those wandering eyes soon gave into temptation, they led to sinful thoughts, which consumed her time. Day after day, she would watch and lust after Joseph, until finally; those thoughts led her to action and we heard where that led her.

Ok, so what's your choice? Would you fit better into the role of the one who so ably fought against temptation and squashed it? Or does the other role fit you a little better? The role where you face temptation and instead of turning and running away, you stand to the side and take a look. The role where you make excuses to hang around, allowing your gaze to turn into thoughts. The role where those thoughts build and embolden the sinful nature to the point that it acts.

I would like, with all of my heart, to be able to say that Joseph's role fits me as the better of the two. I would like to say that I am able to fight temptation when it comes around as ably as Joseph was in this story. But, in honesty, I think the role of Potiphar's wife would be my more likely casting call. It is much easier to see myself as the one who fails to flee temptation, leaving myself open to all kinds of trouble. Take an honest moment to evaluate your own life, how would you cast yourself?

If you're Joseph, you can stop listening. If you're Potiphar's wife, that's not how it is supposed to be, but in a world that is filled with sex, following Paul's words in 1 Corinthians to flee from sexual immorality is often easier said than done. It is on the TV throughout the day, in commercials and shows and sports and movies. It is on the internet, never more than a few clicks away, sometimes even closer. It is on the roads, as common as a cup of coffee. It is around the water cooler and in the locker room,

littered into people's conversations. All of those avenues are opportunities for us to stand on the corner and to observe what is going on. The danger in constantly seeing sex is that it can start to occupy our thoughts. By placing it everywhere, the devil seeks to manipulate something that God designed for our enjoyment and good. He turns our focus away from the husband or wife that God has given us. He tries the patience of those to whom God has not given the gift of marriage. He fills our brains with all these images in the hope that it will trigger a thought, and then he has us. Like Potiphar's wife, we quickly justify those thoughts by saying that they aren't that big of a deal or no one can see them. We reason that we only have these thoughts because our spouse isn't showing us enough attention or meeting our needs. We brush aside the guilt by claiming that they are natural and there is nothing we can do about them. And as long as those thoughts linger in our heads, the devil will be searching for opportunities to put them into practice, starting small and building from there.

So what can we do? It seems like the devil has us surrounded on every side with this one. How can we avoid continually slipping down the slope like Potiphar's wife? At those moments of weakness, let us pray that God might confront our sin the same way that he confronted the sin of Potiphar's wife. God gave her every opportunity to flee from her sinful desires. He used Joseph's strong words and faith to confront her sin. In confessing why he would not join her, he also was preaching to her. His words can certainly curb our sinful thoughts when we drift toward sexual temptation.

First, Joseph pointed out that what she was doing was fueled by ingratitude. **Read vs 8-9:** He spoke of all the blessings and trust that he had been given by Potiphar. He recognized that all he had was truly a blessing from God. Though his circumstance would have permitted him to have even more, he knew that taking more would be a slap in the face of all the blessings he already had. He wanted Potiphar's wife to see the same. She had been afforded so much in her life. Why did she now feel the need to go after the one thing that was not allowed to her? Let that rebuke also refocus our eyes on the things that we have been given and not on what we do not have.

Joseph then reminded Potiphar's wife that her role was as a wife. It is somewhat ironic that a character we know only by the title of Potiphar's wife is also only known for failing miserably at carrying out that role. When we face temptation, let us remember that each and everyone one of us has been given a role by God. And in each of those roles, there is a proper way to regard God's gift of sex. For husbands and wives, this means being faithful to one another in every way. As fiancée or boyfriend or girlfriend, it means being patient and respectful. As those who are single, it means self-control and understanding of God's plans for you. In today's society, it is easy to have our views on marriage and sex swayed by public opinion, but the guidelines for sex that God set up at the creation of the world remain today.

Finally, knowing that Potiphar's wife had no regard for her husband or the boundaries of marriage, Joseph let her know that what she was about to do was against God. **"How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God,"** he said. Though she would not have known who the true God was, Joseph still appealed to her natural conscience. For us who are children of God, this rebuke will have the greatest effect. Even if our respect for the relationships we have been given in this life have waned or dulled, let us always remain mindful of our relationship with God. We might not care how our actions will affect those around us, but let us remember Joseph's words, "How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" We might be able to rationalize, minimize or cover up any of our sexual shortfalls from a worldly perspective, but we cannot succeed in doing that before God. So what can we do?

We can only turn to him for his help. That help is found first in the forgiveness that he gives. Forgiveness that comes through the perfect life and death of his Son, Jesus Christ. Let us confess our sinful thoughts, words and actions and lean heavily on his grace. He will forgive whatever thoughts we have allowed to linger. He will wash away whatever indecent acts we have committed. He will restore whatever bonds we have broken with him. We have been clothed with Christ's perfection and in spite of all that we do to dirty those clothes, our God sees us as perfect.

And he works through the Holy Spirit to give us strength to battle the temptations. He will fill our hearts with faithfulness. He will surround us with the guidance we need to keep our lives in line. He will lift us up when we fall. Most importantly, he will keep us rooted in the fact that we are clothed with the perfection of Christ.

As we leave the security of these walls, it will be hard, if not impossible for us to change our temptation-filled surroundings. But what we can change is how we encounter those temptations. Let us be ever mindful of our roles. Let us return to God's forgiveness. Let us lean on him to be our guide.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. Amen.