

Yayigash **And He Drew Near**
Torah: Genesis 44:18-47:27
Haftarah: Ezek. 37:15-28 (reunification of Israel under the eternal kingship of David)
Brit Chadashah: Luke 6:12-16 (Selection of the twelve apostles)

In this portion, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and makes arrangements for his family to join him in Egypt, so they are not destroyed by the five years of famine which are still to come. We see Judah moving into a leadership roll which eclipses Reuben and Joseph reveals to his brothers that it was the hand of G-d which led Joseph to become the ruler of Egypt. Jacob is presented to Pharaoh and Joseph uses wisdom to acquire great wealth for Pharaoh during the last years of the famine.

Judah knows that all that has happened to them in dealings with Joseph is pay back for the way they mistreated their brother. He is not willing to return to his father without his younger brother and intercedes with Joseph to let him stay in Benjamin's place. He is adopting an intercessory role that will elevate his generational status above that of his brothers. The temporary elevation and salvation came through Joseph, but the final salvation and the eternal elevation shall come through Judah, when as David's greater Son, He shall inaugurate G-d's eternal kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind.

Joseph has come to terms with the betrayal of his brothers and sees how a unique set of circumstances came together to position him to enter Pharaoh's household. No matter how hard or how painful our circumstances become, as we turn them over to G-d and exercise faithful obedience, we will see the impossible become possible because no weapon forged against us will prosper and He will make all things work together for our good.

Now this is not to say that we will obtain great wealth and success beyond our wildest dreams as we float to heaven on a trouble free cloud of ease. It means that as long as we surrender our circumstances to G-d and learn to react in faith and in obedience, G-d's purposes will be fulfilled through us, whether we sit on a throne like Joseph or wander through the wilderness like John the Baptist.

Joseph knew that it was G-d who put him where he was and he began to understand the visions he has received, because indeed his whole family did bow down before him. He did nothing to manipulate the circumstances in order to facilitate the accomplishment of his visions, he merely watched them happen, as he walked in faith and obedience through some pretty gruesome trials.

Joseph's brothers accept the situation as the hand of G-d and when Pharaoh hears about their plans to go back to Canaan and retrieve their father and their families, he is pleased. He may have been secretly afraid that Joseph would pine after his family and leave Egypt. He did not want to lose such a valuable servant and Joseph's brothers might prove to be a great source of blessing for Egypt as well.

An extensive caravan is organized for the return journey, loaded with riches, along with wagons for the young and the old and as a sign of good faith, Benjamin is allowed to return to his father. Joseph no longer needed a hostage in order to restore his link with his family.

Jacob is at first very skeptical – after all weren't these the same sons who lied to him about Joseph and now he is supposed to believe them when they weave such a fantastic story. As he examines the caravan, he is reassured and goes on what he knows will be his final journey in this life. He gets to see his favorite son again, before he dies. I wonder what he said to his guilty sons whose lies caused him so much pain.

As he is getting ready to leave, he has an encounter with G-d and is reassured that G-d will be with him as he goes down to Egypt and will be with him when he comes up out of Egypt once again. He will become a great nation and Joseph will shut his father's eyes – in other words he will die in the presence of his most beloved son and will encounter no more painful adventures in the remaining years of his life.

Seventy people descend into Egypt with Jacob and the genealogy indicates that a new series of events will be unfolding as more and more of G-d's promises become a reality for the children of Jacob. When Jacob arrives in Egypt, he sends Judah to notify Joseph and what follows is one of the most emotional and joyful reunions in the Scriptures. They wept together.

Joseph's family is to live in isolation from the Egyptians, in Goshen, since shepherds were an abomination to them. They are put in charge of all the flocks of Pharaoh and Joseph prepared to present his father to Pharaoh. He is now 130 years old and Joseph is 32 years old. Jacob blesses Pharaoh and will probably never see him again, but he and his family are given a privileged position in a very fertile area of the land.

Once they are settled, Joseph can get on with dealing with five more years of famine. There was no more bread in Egypt. Either the waters of the Nile did not rise high enough to irrigate the Egyptian fields or the rains failed, or both. For whatever reason, the people were starving and they had no more money to buy the wheat which Joseph still had a huge supply of. Joseph received all their flocks and herds and four kinds of domestic animals are mentioned. Horses, Egypt's war animal; sheep, the source of Egypt's wool; cattle, the source of Egypt's meat and hides and finally, donkeys, Egypt's beasts of burden. Now most of what it took to run the economy of Egypt, became Pharaoh's property.

The next year, the famine did not abate and Joseph bought all the people and their lands, either in a single year or over two more years. They were now the property of Pharaoh, and except for the lands of the pagan priests, the people had to work as bond servants on Pharaoh's lands. The people were happy with this arrangement because it meant they would not starve to death and they willingly surrendered 20% of their harvests back to Pharaoh. They may have also had to pay a fee to access the beasts they had sold to Pharaoh, but thanks to Joseph's wisdom and ingenuity, all the people and all the lands now belonged to Pharaoh along with all the means of production.

Pharaoh became incredibly wealthy permanently and to maintain this relationship of ownership, all the people lived in towns and went out to work the land, but they no longer lived on it – so more of it could be grazed and farmed. They were all Pharaoh's servants who worked Pharaoh's lands, with the exception of Goshen, where all the profitable animals were kept and cared for by Joseph's family. They were never sold to Pharaoh and none of their possessions belonged to Pharaoh – they just remained a great source of blessing as they slowly grew into a great people. The original 70 became tens of thousands, both from natural increase and from any number of Egyptians who joined their ranks and were also blessed.

Sermon: Happy New Year, a Time to Find Your destiny

Passage: "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under Heaven."
(Eccl. 3:1)

I believe that there are great things in store for us in 2020. We have come through a fairly lean time and are now seeing things move our way again. It is my constant prayer that all of you would find gainful employment and be able to more than abundantly meet the needs of your family. As we honour G-d with our tithes and offerings, the coffers of our shul will fill up again and I can continue dreaming about an assistant to train as we move towards one day buying our own building. When we are focused on YHVH, our dreams change.

In the interim we want to be the best and friendliest renters on the planet, as we remain a source of great blessing for the community which welcomes us as tenants. We want to show both by our words and by our actions, that we take the Bible seriously and will give our best and most persistent effort to cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in our darkening world.

Now much has been said and much has been written about believers discovering their destiny and moving ever deeper into the purposes of G-d, but this is not always widely understood from a biblical perspective. You see, I firmly believe that everything happens for a purpose and there are no casual happenstances in the kingdom purposes of G-d. Now this does not mean that we live in the best of all possible worlds and that everything around the planet is turning out the way G-d has always intended when it comes to how mankind should conduct its affairs. The folly of our world is never the will of G-d.

There are a lot of bad, crazy things that are happening across our globe and the pagan darkness of evolution is joining hands with the painful darkness of false religions to try and drown out the voice of G-d's Spirit, even as He never ceases to call out to mankind (Prov. 1:20-23). Murder, assault, rape, theft and the oppression of widows and orphans is on the rise, even in our peaceful little corner of the globe.

So how can we say that G-d's will is being done in how things turn out, when so much of what is happening globally is occurring in direct violation of G-d's Word and His commandments? Now it is one thing to say that nothing happens by chance and quite another to say that G-d makes all things happen in a certain way so that His will is accomplished unopposed in how everything is turning our across our backsliding world.

I want us to seek our destiny and be in the place where G-d is calling us to, so that we can do His will in every area of our lives. But when we consider natural disasters and the spread of global diseases as more and more people are suffering from famine and hunger, it is hard to see the will of G-d in all of this tragic nonsense.

Well, let me bring understanding to a biblical view of destiny, so that we understand what is being said when people say everything is turning out the way it should. Every event, be it ever so pleasant or ever so painful, carries with it a message from G-d, along with a reaction which He wants us to respond with. As well, there is no temptation which comes our way, without a divine way of escape, so that no one and nothing in life will ever be allowed to corner us or trap us into responding in opposition to the Word of our King.

Jewish people have seen more than our fair share of horror and we have been slaughtered, persecuted and relentlessly chased from one nation to another for no good reason. And yet through it all, we have remained a blessing to all nations and we have prospered and flourished, when we are welcomed and can go about our business unmolested.

It would seem that two opposing forces are vying for control in every scenario it has been our experience to encounter. The enemy of our souls is trying with all of his might to extinguish us and bring global pain and suffering upon all the scattered children of Adam and Eve. Sexual immorality of any form is a kind of soul suffering that ravages individuals and cultures whenever this monster is allowed out of its cage.

On the other hand, a strong sense of purpose and destiny and duty often guides people and nations as they strive to do their best to walk in righteousness and mercy, and great good is accomplished through the efforts of these people who believe in being good. However, since the 1700's, the accelerated rate of change has brought as much misery as it has brought good, as the various cultures and political systems of our planet moved on an increasing collision course. The globe was gobbled up by empires until there was no more land left for anyone to conquer, so the mighty developed nations of the world turned their advanced military splendour on each other, not once, but twice in a single generation.

World War I and World War II caused untold damage and brought death to hundreds of millions of innocent people. Progress is not slowing down, but neither are the military applications which this progress provides for the international armed camp which is our world.

Tradition values, along with traditional beliefs have been abandoned and even though we have so far averted the threat of a nuclear war, the rumours of war are never far from what is going on around the globe. How can things be turning out the way they are supposed to be when all of this chaos and greed and hatred are allowed to run rampant across the globe?

Now, I am firmly convinced that the arrival of G-d's eternal kingdom in His Son is an unstoppable reality that is bearing down on our unsuspecting world even as I speak these words. And it is our duty to see that we are kingdom bound and need to be kingdom powered and kingdom focused, no matter how dark it grows. And even in the midst of horror, disease and hunger, people are brought together and some are rescued out of the mouth of disaster.

It is our destiny to see every happenstance as a gift from G-d, whether we are exalted higher than the mountains or whether we are plowed under, lower than the depth of the seas. Sometimes narrow escapes and mighty provision fill our hearts and lives with countless treasures, while at other times we are herded together, robbed, beaten and even executed, just for the sin of being Jewish, or for the sin of being a believer in the Messiah from Nazareth.

I believe our congregation has a great destiny and that one day very soon, we will truly become generationally sustainable, as we see an expanded ministry team, working towards our own building. Along the way, we have made considerable progress and have suffered considerable setbacks, not because the purposes of G-d are being stalled, but because of the choices people have made. But G-d's will and protection and provision are greater than the folly of mere men and woman and in everything, we shall be more than conquerors as He guides our feet on the straight and narrow, no matter how bumpy the road gets.

When something happens to us and we have a choice to make, we need to learn to make

choices that are outlined in His Word and not derived from the taunting, seductive world which surrounds us and through which we are only traveling. Our lives will always be filled with encounters with destiny which I call redemptive opportunities, whether we get that long awaited promotion or are smacked in the face for no good reason.

It is G-d who is in charge of what He allows to come into our lives and when we respond in faith and in obedience, we are storing up for ourselves a great weight of glory, when the folly of this fading world finally dissolves before the brightness of our Messiah's return. So in a very real sense, we were born to choose and these will either embrace His intended destiny for us or they will cause us to stumble and fall by the wayside as we let His kingdom purposes pass us by, or run us over. They can never be stopped or even really stalled.

I want 2020 to be a year of mighty destiny where we see all the good and mighty things which the L-rd will bring our way, even if we encounter a little turbulence along the way. I know where I am headed and I realize that there is an escalating opposition to a biblical world view, but that will never scare me away from my biblical faith in the supernatural Creator G-d of the Bible. We may suffer mockery or even legal penalties as we shine and proclaim the truth of the Gospel and the Torah, but at every turn, there is both a way of escape and a duty for us to perform in everything which we encounter.

The neat thing about our G-d, is that even our death is a joyful release and no amount of pain or suffering is worth being compared to the peace and love and joy which is awaiting us in His presence. I will miss Jeanie, but I realize she has just graduated and is asleep until the kingdom bursts forth and we all enter eternity together. We will meet again.

Our destiny is never limited to a certain set of circumstances happening in a certain order. There is no magic formula to make sure we get a better deal than others who do not share our supposed faith where we can name it and claim it. What happens to us is a collision between the purposes of G-d and the various choices people have made, some good, some bad. We may not like it when we encounter loss and pain and see other people floating on clouds of ease and prosperity. We just need to keep on walking and believing.

If the truth be told, very rich people do not have a better time of it than those of us who are less wealthy. Some people are driven to achieve great things, others are content to do the best they can as they lead quiet lives filled with peace and satisfaction. Some people seem to have all the luck, while others suffer greatly through no fault of their own.

Learning to embrace our destiny means understanding that nothing happens randomly, but that all is under the ultimate control of G-d and everything we encounter has a message from G-d and duty He wishes us to perform. How good are you at recognizing the hand of G-d in the happenstances of your life? I believe there is a place we are supposed to move to and we are actively negotiating with several locations. The time of the year has slowed us down somewhat, but the blessing and the provision of the L-rd will see us through to our next location in record time. It is an exciting time to walk with the L-rd.

I want to close by repeating my understanding of destiny as the empowering of G-d which all of us receive on our often colourful and bumpy pilgrimage through this life on our way to our Father's house in glory. We need to buckle up and watch as things unfold around us. Over the years, I have gathered a series of some 20 discipleship lists and these principles often

occur in groups of five. In Hebrew, five expresses a high degree of certainty and walking with the L-rd according to His Word, is the best way of maximizing His certainty in your life and in the life of this congregation.

We are all endowed with five endowments and taken together they will determine the success or the failure of our spiritual progress as we journey through this life. The first is **free will**, or the ability to choose how to respond to the whatevers which come our way. This does not mean we are completely free agents, deciding what direction our lives will take as if we were the one writing the script of our lives.

Free will means we chose how to respond and we are judged on these responses and not on the happenstances over which we have no control. Some choices are made for us – none of the passengers on the Titanic chose to sink, but how they behaved as they sank was a choice they made. What choices are you making?

Next is something which I call **dignity** – which means we suffer the consequences of choices we have made or which have been made for us. We reap what we sow and often we reap what other people have sown for us. When the Americans were deciding where to drop the first atomic bomb, they first selected an old imperial capital that one of the soldiers in the room said he was looking forward to visiting after the war. Through no fault of their own, Hiroshima was selected as the replacement target and one chance remark sealed the fate of tens of thousands of people. Accidents, crimes of violence, and being in the right place at the right time will not so much define us as how we choose to respond to the good, the bad and the ugly which comes our way. How are you handling what G-d has brought your way?

Next comes **time** and we only have so much of it. Each year goes by more quickly for each of us, because every year is a smaller and smaller part of our age. I am starting to feel my age, because things go by quicker and quicker. Since I only have so much time, I must use it for the Kingdom and not squander it on the works of the flesh (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life). What do you dedicate your time to? How good are you at spending your time for the kingdom and not for the world?

Then there is **energy**, which gets gradually less as we age. But funnily enough our ability to concentrate only increases with age, even when our physical energy begins to fade. I have walked with the L-rd nearly 48 years and I am not sure I will have another 48 years before it is my turn to sleep in the dust, but I want my primary energy to be given over to the kingdom and not to the things which do not satisfy. How are you using your energy?

Last is **gifting** – or the talents all of us are born with. We may not all become Olympic athletes, concert pianists or award winning scientists, but there are things which some of us are good at and others we are not so good at. We need to do what we know we can do well, and compensate for those things we are not good at. How good are you at embracing your gifting? We need to learn not to be jealous of other people's gifting as we embrace our own.

Free will, dignity, time, energy and gifting are the building blocks of our destiny in our blessed Messiah. May 2020 be a year where destiny wins over everything else which tries to get in our way. Join us as we explore the goodness of our Messiah. No other life is worth it. Walking with Him according to His Word is our destiny. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.