

SERMON: Parashat Vay'chi

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Can we just share a moment together - **WHAT A YEAR IT HAS BEEN!**

Let's just take a moment, take a breath and exhale and just lay down some of the burden of this past year.

What is the one weight you are carrying from this past year that you just need to lay down?

We have each been challenged in different ways, as each person and family is different in how this has hit them. But we have all shared in the sense of stress, of anxiety, of physical distance, of a social life in suspended animation. So much of this year has been about just moving forward, figuring out how to keep things going during all this. A good bit of energy has gone into just adjusting, coping, managing, and trying to stay positive.

We now stand much closer to a sense of hope, as there is some end in sight. But I believe this year will also call to us to help others in our community in ways we haven't been called to do in a while. After any battle, there is a momentary pause, and then the work of cleaning up and repair. That work will fall on all of us in the coming years.

The economic impact of this pandemic is going to be felt painfully by some.

There is a soaring need for food assistance.

We will be facing a crisis in housing, due to evictions, foreclosures, and loss.

We will be facing a country in which many are in grief.

As we open outdoors and look out at this new year, let's look around and see what others need, where we can help, and what actions we can take in our families, and our communities to help us repair from the tear this plague and our politics have created.

This week in the Torah, we read the end of the book of Genesis and the end of the story of Joseph. Joseph, having been sold by his brothers into slavery, then sexually attacked by his boss's wife, then thrown into prison for years only to rise to become the director of Egypt's relief plan for the famine that is coming.

Joseph's brothers now hungry come down to ask for food and supplies to take home. Joseph tests them to make sure they have changed, and when satisfied, Joseph bursts into uncontrollable sobs and hugs them all.

Joseph is an excellent role model for us in the coming year:

1. Joseph stays true to his gifts and finds ways to employ his gifts to serve the greatest good.
2. Joseph doesn't hold on to anger at people who harmed him. Instead, in the face of a crisis, he lets it go and reunites with them. Extraordinary times remind us of our shared humanity and call us to forgiveness.
3. Joseph doesn't spend a lot of time complaining about the injustices done to him or being sullen and angry about it. Instead, he is **forward looking**, sees there is a crisis coming of hunger, and he comes up with a tangible plan to see the people through the crisis.
4. Joseph is able to think big. He comes up with innovative ways to address the crisis at hand, and to do so fairly by rationing resources until the crisis is over. May we have some of Joseph's innovation and insight in handling the difficulties that are coming.

I am so proud of how well Vermont has done, and Temple Sinai has done during this pandemic. We've had extraordinary, Joseph-like leadership, and we have relied on strong community values.

I'm proud of Temple Sinai and how we've come together during all this, how we've even grown.

I'm proud that people have found such amazing ways to stay connected during all this, the inspiring creativity that has been released.

But I know that when we look back at this time, we will want to know we did what we needed to do to help one another get through this. We will want to know that we were not people who put all our attention into protecting what was ours, but that we were people who went out of our way to help others.

We will want to know that we lived up to our own values, and to Jewish values that command us that clothing, feeding, and housing the poor and the sick are the highest expressions of what it means to be human, what it means to love your neighbor as yourself - what it means to serve God by serving one another. As we step out into this new year, let's do so with a sense of purpose, and commitment, and willingness to be the good we want to see in the world.