

**A Sermon preached by Mary Scalzi at  
Clarence Presbyterian Church on Sunday, August 20, 2023.**

**STOREHOUSES**

***I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.***

**Genesis 45:11**

In this time of our church's transition, we have heard so many great sermons. I have thought a lot about the sermon we heard a few weeks ago by Rev. Cynthia Wickwire Lundquist... about the *new* path that some seeds fell on. Those seeds fell, not in the tilled ruts or planned soil. These were seeds that fell, onto a *new* path – one that Jesus was taking people to, and Jesus explained that some seeds would make it on this new path. You can listen to Rev. Cynthia Wickwire Lundquist's sermon on July 16 on our website under sermon archives.

Then we heard the sermon called "How Kingdoms Grow" and we heard that wonderful example of the back story to Martin Luther King Jr.'s rise. How he gave credit to his father as the real father of civil rights, but his father gave credit to one before him as the father of civil rights and so on back to seeds planted through someone in 1879. You can read the full example in Dr. Ken Hughes sermon from July 30 on our church website.

And, who can forget the wheat and the tares sermon and letting both the weeds and the wheat grow up together. It's not our call to pull the weeds, by Rev. Amy Jelensperger. Sermon also found on our website.

For me, participating with our church in supporting United Kenya Rising, an organization so far away in Africa reminds me of all of these examples. Who knows what will come from seeds? How far will they spread? How much good can they do? So many seeds were planted, and are still being planted, to make the ministry there in Kakamega, Kenya, thrive. The mission started small, feeding orphans on the street and today it's a storehouse, serving its community as a beacon of light and an example of God's love. United Kenya Rising, or UKR as it's called, employs 35 people, people who otherwise would not have a job. UKR serves over 200 families in their county and the surrounding counties. And, it has maintained the school life for countless children now many graduating from college and trade schools; seeds that will plant more seeds. UKR's mission: to assist families and students as they rise out of poverty.

Sharing support with the people of Kakamega also reminds me of Joseph's story. Our scripture today comes from Genesis, 45 vs. 11. Joseph asks his brothers, "say to his father, I will provide for you there – since there are five more years of famine to come – so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty." (ESV or NIV become destitute.) God cares about poverty. In fact, [sojo.net](http://sojo.net) lists more than 2000 verses in scripture, old and new testament, on poverty and justice. Take care of the poor is a consistent theme. We all know the story of Joseph. We often think of it as a story of forgiveness and reconciliation, but it is striking to me that it is also a story of how God kept people from becoming impoverished. You remember the story of how Joseph's 11 brothers sold him to slavery. They hated him. They were jealous of him. The famous quote – Genesis 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." (Let's not even talk about how that reflects to Jesus' life and death as well.)

The storehouses Joseph built during his time in Egypt really struck me. They were storehouses not just for Joseph and his family (and I don't think Joseph even knew this at the time), the story goes on to say that all of Egypt came to Joseph and benefited from his storehouses, and then, the whole world ended up coming to Joseph! Chapter 41:57 says – And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world.

This was my third trip to Kakamega and so much there is changing. This time, our trip began with a three-night stay on the beautiful East African coast of Kenya at the beaches south of Mombasa. You can picture them on the Indian Ocean's warm light blue waters with the yellow and orange hazy sun filled skies. These beautiful days in sort of "luxury" Kenyan style, still plenty of bugs coming indoors and water not always working correctly, uniquely African style. But, this beautiful beginning came into sharp contrast (much like Joseph's luxury in Egypt, to the ensuing famine years) as we left there and continued our journey to Western Kenya, all the way to the other side of Kenya, to the rapidly developing town called Kakamega.

Five years ago, on my first trip there, this was primarily a village of dirt roads, but now Kakamega is a fast-growing town complete with paved roads, more cars, peeky peekies, (motorcycles), and, in fact, plans are in the works to get their own air strip and soon we will be able to fly directly into Kakamega, from Nairobi, which would be like flying from here to NYC. And still, so much poverty exists in a culture of subsistence living. Dirt roads still make up all of the areas of rural farmlands. Food is not always plentiful and dependent on the rainy season. I saw so many tilled fields, waiting for the rains to come so they could plant. But, the rains weren't coming.

It is foreign, to be in an environment of subsistence living. People eat what they grow, wear what is on their backs, there are not closets full of clothes, there are no closets, or dressers, and not very often is there a mattress. But, people are happy and live well as long as they have food, shelter, and the love of people around them. All the day's work is done for the day's living. It is a fragile system when you are in a culture of subsistence living. Anything can set the balance off – becoming widowed, losing a job, a robbery. The stakes are so much higher. A famine hits so much harder. The line between destitution and well-being is much closer. Jesus cares about the poor.

Also, it is not easy to accept help. Especially when you have felt guilty about what might have gotten you into this position in the first place. Imagine Joseph's brothers. They had done Joseph so wrong. They were so humbled and speechless when they came to get their rations and provisions and realized it was Joseph who owned the storehouses. Imagine Joseph in that image of such intimacy and caring, throwing his arms around the neck of Benjamin, and his brothers, and his father and hugging them, hard. And weeping. Happy to help.

I'd like to tell one story from Kakamega. I remember being in the home of a man, Simon. He invited us to sit at his simple four-legged wooden table in one of his two mud rooms, the floors, hard packed dirt. He was proud to seat us at a table with chairs. It was the only furniture I observed anywhere in his house or on his property. Two of his girls were in school, but the littlest was in mom's arms looking on with awe as we talked. It had not been easy for Simon to accept help at first. His family had been doing all right. He would occasionally find day labor – building clay bricks for a day, cutting wood, hauling water from the river. But, lately, he couldn't find day labor. And a previous incident had upset the balance of his life.

He had once had chickens and a chicken coup, and a sort of whole barnyard, and a goat. But, thieves had come in the night and stolen his goat and his chickens. And, he was embarrassed about this because he had not had his coups locked up or close enough to the house to help prevent robbery. He owned about an acre or two of land in the midst of many acres that were owned and farmed by others. It was a long walk to his house in what seemed like the middle of nowhere. And now everything was escalating, he needed help. He and his wife were industrious. They plowed by hand their fields and were waiting to plant. They were trying to start a small chicken business and have their own milk from their goat for their children. But, he couldn't find work.

I sat at his table and listened through the translator at how grateful he was to have received another goat and chickens, and agricultural support so he could rebuild and take care of his own family. And, he also talked about how during that time, he had no

ideas, no thoughts for his future. He couldn't say it, but the freeze and dormancy that poverty puts you in, depression, had a hold on him, but now it had lifted and he could dream again. And now his mind was reimagining more ways to prosper with his wife and family. With the financial support and guidance from United Kenya Rising, he was able to rebuild the coops and goat house...mostly made out of wood he'd collected. He put locks on them and they were close to his two-room house now. He expressed how grateful he was to have his life back and his family's life. He was proud to tell about what he was doing.

On the way back to the UKR offices, that day, squished in the small compact car, five of us, two Americans, three Kenyans – unairconditioned car, windows open, the heat and the dirt kicked up from the road blowing into the car, a Kenyan social worker on either side of me, I listened as they continued to talk about what a changed man Simon was. Their excitement and enthusiasm with him and for him for how helped he was, was so moving. They were so moved, so glad the Mamas on the board for UKR had referred the family to the organization. Their talk got to me emotionally even more than the visit. The love and passion they expressed and showed reminded me of Joseph. Joseph who threw his arms around the neck of his brothers and his father and hugged and wept. People serving others, sharing their storehouses, brings intense emotion and joy.

Our church does so much with our storehouses. We do what God puts in front of us to do, and we plant where God tells us to plant, and we listen to the spirit, and some things land and grow. Like Joseph, who became the treasurer for all of Pharaoh's wealth, building storehouses, saving. The rest is up to God. We are a part of some great things here at Clarence Presbyterian Church, things bigger than any one of us. We have so much to share. And we are loving each other in big and small ways each and every day – making ourselves vulnerable and available to each other, and to others, inside and outside of the church, loving each other, and living in community, *and planting seeds*. Kakamega, Kenya is one of those stories. Who knows what stories are to come in the future. May we never be like the person in the gospel of Luke, who built his storehouses just for himself. Whatever God puts in front of us to do, for the planting of love and justice, we must do.