



July 19, 2020

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost | Rite 13 Celebration of Womanhood

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Genesis 28:10-19^a

My niece and nephew, Jae'da and Jordyn, turned 15 years old just a couple of weeks ago. They're twins. And when my sister found out that she was pregnant, with twins no less, she was shocked, as were all of us. And although my paternal grandmother had a set of twins and therefore twins were always a possibility, it was still a pleasant surprise to find out that she was carrying twins.

She asked me to be in the O.R. when they were born. Jae'da was born first. She came out and her eyes were open, and she made no sound at all. She just looked into this bright world with all of the doctors. And then shortly thereafter my nephew Jordyn comes out and, he was just a baby, making a little noise and all messy, and they cleaned him up. Beautiful, beautiful twins.

Now, I don't think my sister's pregnancy and the birth of my niece and nephew were anywhere nearly as dramatic as the one of Jacob and Esau. We heard last week the story about Rebecca, their mother, being pregnant with twins, and they strove together in the womb up until the time that they were born, so much so that Esau was born first and Jacob had his hand on his brother's heel as he was pulling them out.

Of course we now the story from a couple of weeks ago, that God had let Rebecca in on God's plan that Jacob, the second born, would be the one that would be blessed, the one that would have the birthright, the one that would continue the family name forward — not the first-born, not Esau.

And, if you're keeping score at home, we're doing a lot of hopping and skipping through Genesis. But what we know from Genesis is that Rebecca conspires with her son Jacob (as Isaac, her husband and Jacob and Esau's father, is dying) to try to get Isaac to bless Jacob instead of Esau. Jacob is covered in fur because Esau was hairy and Isaac was blind, and she makes Isaac some food...all so that Isaac could bless Jacob, and he does.

Not long after Jacob leaves, Esau comes in. Of course, his father is fresh out of blessings. He's given everything, everything to Jacob. Esau is understandably furious, although we know from earlier on in the story, he didn't seem care much about the birthright or the blessing. But now he is upset.

And Jacob flees. Esau has vowed to kill him.

Jacob needs to find a wife and so he sets off on a 400-mile journey to the land of Haran, the land of his mother's people. He sets off there with his brother chasing him, his father betrayed.

Perhaps losing all of his possessions and his dowry along the way, he is making this journey alone.

And at some point in the journey, he stops for a pit stop, takes a sleep in the night on a rock. He has this dream. He dreams of this great stone structure, a ziggurat perhaps. In the middle of this wilderness, and the angels of God are ascending and descending, and God begins to speak to Jacob and says:

"I am God, the God of your father Isaac, the God of his father Abraham. I know why you are here. And I promise to be with you. I'll make sure that you get back, because it is my intention to give you this land where you're sleeping right now."

Jacob wakes up the next day. He says, *"Truly the Lord was in this place and I didn't know it."* And he sets a stone to mark the place, to memorialize the place, and he goes on. He vows to make the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac his God, since God has pledged God's self to Jacob.

What does this all mean? What relevance does it have to us today?

I think, importantly, Genesis is the story not only of these characters that we have been reading about, but it is the story of God. And this is just another shining example of the God that covenants with humankind. God says to Jacob, *"I am going to be with you. I am going to watch over you. I am going to protect you."*

The interesting thing about this though, this word "protect," is that it is almost invariably used in the Old Testament for human responses to God. As a matter of fact, this is the same Hebrew word that is used when God tells Adam to tend the garden, to protect the garden, to look out for the garden. And, of course, Adam, wasn't really successful in that.

And several generations of humankind were also charged with the same task — to honor the covenant, to honor God, to keep the commandments and expectations of God — and they couldn't do it.

Perhaps now, for the first time in the Scriptures, God says, *"I am going to do for you what you have been unable to do for me. I am going to watch out for you. I am going to protect you. I am going to covenant with you. I am going to show you what it means to be in covenant. I am going to show you what it means to be committed."*

Perhaps that's our greatest qualm with God, as a contemporary audience. Because although we see these characters in all of their oops, bleeps and blunders, why is it that God is so committed to these individuals? I mean, Abraham lied about his wife to the Egyptians, and he

seems to prosper for it. Isaac did the same thing, and he seems to prosper for it. Jacob, Jacob deceived his father, and now God is covenanting with him.

I think that's our greatest qualm with God — it's God's faithfulness. That no matter how unfaithful we are, humans are, God remains faithful to humans. This blessing, this covenant, perhaps tells us more about God than it does about ourselves:

- That God is committed to human flourishing.
- That God is committed to bringing forth his Word.
- That all the families of the earth will be blessed, even if it's through broken people.
- That God will not abandon us to our own devices, to our own mistakes, to our own oops, bleeps and blunders, because God's Word must come to pass if God actually *is* God.

That's upsetting, because it seems like people whom we think shouldn't succeed do.

God is faithful.

And God works around the mistakes that we make, the errors that we make. He planned for that contingency, all so that his glorious plan could be brought about.

Jacob said, *"Surely the Lord was in this place."* Have you ever been there? Have you ever been in a situation in real life [and found] that God was in the place that you least expected God to be? Thanks be to God!

He surprises us in those places. For perhaps, like Jacob, when we feel the most judged, the most disappointed in ourselves, God is there. God reveals God's self and says, *"I know what you think about yourself. Look, your name means 'deceiver'."*

What God told Jacob, what God tells us, is, *"It doesn't matter what your name is. It doesn't matter what you think about yourself. It doesn't matter that you don't have what you think you should,"* because Verse 20 of the passage that we read today (Genesis 28:20), says *"God, if you're going to make sure that I eat and drink and get to where I am going, yeah, you can be my God."*

So, perhaps Jacob is feeling destitute and alone in facing this gargantuan task of crossing this wilderness without the resources that he needs. No matter what Jacob thought about himself and his situation, no matter what we think about ourselves and our situations, God reveals God's self to say, *"I am God. I am the one who has made the promise and the covenant, and I am going to see that you get to your destination safely and get back to this place, because I am going to give this to you."*

When we are most afraid, when we are the most critical of ourselves, God says, *"Have you considered my opinion about you? Have you considered my promise to you? Have you considered the fact that that God believes in you, even when you don't believe in yourself?"*

And, so, yes. God is there. God is with us, protecting us, watching over us, keeping us.

And that doesn't mean the absence of opposition. Jesus says in the Gospel that the wheat and tare are going to grow together (Matthew 13:30). And one day when the time is right, they'll be separated, but right now just let the wheat and tare grow together. Whatever mental, spiritual, physical opposition that you might be facing in your life, God knows. God sees. God hears.

And as much as we would like God to strike down our enemies or help us escape, God says, *"No, I think I just want to deal with you. I think I just want to talk with you. I think I just want to address you and your perspective."*

You see, when Jacob awoke from that dream, the wilderness was still the same. He was just as broke then as he was the day before. What *changed* was his perspective. He had new vision. He had new hope. And so he marked the place with a stone.

Perhaps it's not the external that God wants to change. Perhaps it's not the external that God wants us to have hope for, but it's the *internal* that God wants to change...your perspective. And it begins with understanding that God's words about you are *far* more important and *far* more weighty than the opinions and judgments you make about yourself and that others make about you.

We know that when we pray, we don't always know what to ask. Jacob may not have known what to ask either. But God, in God's graciousness, gives us just what we need, even if we don't know how to ask for it.

So, if the secret prayer of your heart has been this week, *"Lord, help me. Help me to love myself. Help me to love others,"* consider this Word to be your answer:

"I am with you."