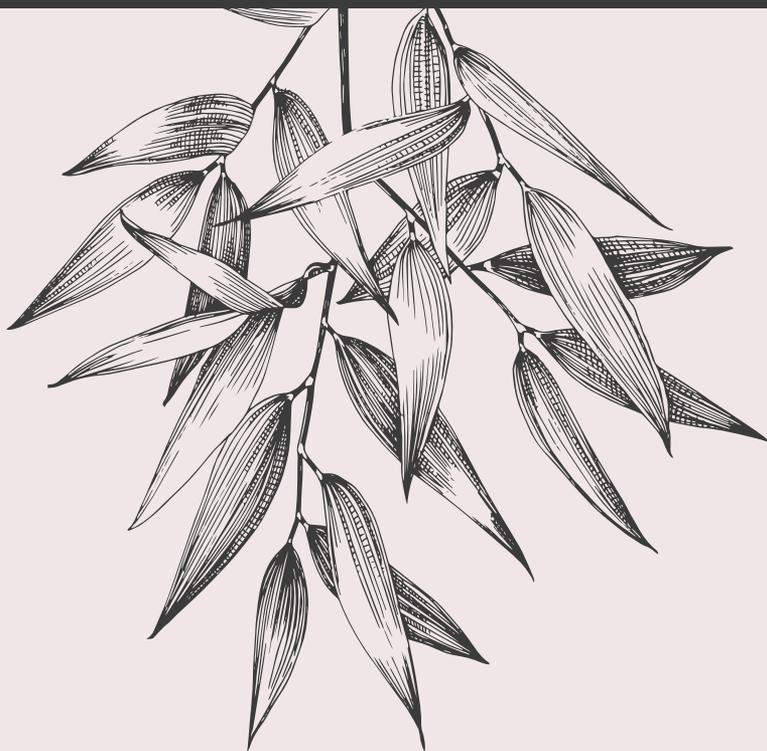


JOURNEY THROUGH GENESIS



50 DAYS OF

# *Eastertide*

A DAILY DEVOTIONAL

*by the pastors of First Presbyterian Church of Nashville*

WEEK 5

SUNDAY, MAY 10

## READ

*Genesis 29*

## REFLECT

It's one of the more romantic stories we have in the Genesis account. Jacob falls in love and is willing to work 7 years in order to marry Rachel. Then "the Deceiver" is deceived by his uncle Laban and is given Rachel's sister, Leah, instead. He wakes up the morning after his wedding and rolls over to kiss his new bride only to discover it is Leah, the one with "weak eyes". Here's the thing, whenever we enter into relationship with someone (especially in marriage) we believe we are getting Rachel. And we are. But we are also getting Leah. We are in relationship with broken, imperfect human beings. Whether with your spouse or your parents, your coworkers or your friends, your siblings or the cashier at Kroger, every person we encounter will inevitably excite us AND disappoint us. And we will do the same to them.

Craig Barnes puts it like this, "Whoever it is that you love, that person is both Leah and Rachel. You may love one more than the other, but they are wrapped into the same person. Rachel is the one you love, and you're sure that she will be the blessing to your life. But you can't have Rachel without taking Leah, who you don't love and you didn't think you were getting. Not long after you are together, you discover you didn't get just Rachel. You're also very involved with Leah, and you can work for years trying to turn her into Rachel."

## RESPOND

What relationship in your life can you relate to this story right now? Think of that person and imagine both their Rachel and Leah tendencies. How could you be more generous and loving towards them in the week to come? What ways could you focus on the redeeming Rachel qualities a little bit more?

## PRAY

*God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you continue to use fragile, inconsistent people to partner with in your work. We are grateful. Help us to extend that same grace and care towards those we share life with here on earth. May we see our loved ones through eyes of compassion – through Your eyes. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY, MAY 11

## READ

Genesis 30

## REFLECT

Fear drives everything in this chapter. Rachel is afraid she will never bear children. Leah is afraid she won't have any more children. Laban is afraid Jacob will leave. Jacob is afraid that he won't get what Laban promised. Fear drives each person to manipulate their situation for personal gain by whatever means necessary. They are dissatisfied with the story God is writing and they try to author it instead. Rachel takes a page out of Sarai's book and gives Jacob her slave girl as a wife. Leah does the same thing. Laban takes all the male livestock he promised Jacob so they wouldn't breed. Jacob tricks the livestock into breeding better stock for himself than Laban. All the players in this passage allow fear and anxiety to lead them to create loopholes and deception. Often times, we allow our fear to fool us into thinking we can take matters into our own hands. We avoid the discomfort of fear and anxiety with the illusion of control. During this pandemic the volume of fear is so loud it's hard to hear anything else. It seems we either avoid our fear with a false sense of control or we white knuckle our feelings and do whatever to find loopholes around it. But there's another way. We don't have to fool ourselves into thinking that we are in control. We can be kind to our fear. We can hold it tenderly and courageously share it with the only one who can receive it. We can offer our fear to God, the only one who can transform despair into hope, pandemic into purpose, and death into life.

## RESPOND

What are you afraid of right now? What's your tolerance level for the anxiety that seems to be permeating our culture right now? How are you trying to take control, author your own story, or find loopholes around your anxiety? What would it look like for you to trust God today? Imagine yourself tenderly holding your fears and placing them in the hands of God.

## PRAY

*God, You create order out of chaos. You bring light into darkness. You season despair with seeds of hope. You bring peace into places of fear. You transform the cross of judgement into the throne of grace. Remind us that when it comes to this pandemic, You are more qualified than we are to be in control. We hand our fear to You as an offering of worship and love. In the name of Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh. Amen.*

## DAY 31

TUESDAY, MAY 12

### READ

Genesis 31

### REFLECT

The Lord watch between me and thee.

Have you ever heard that verse cited in a sweet way, as in a benediction? I have. At some point, I was taught that it isn't a benediction. It's a warning from Laban to Jacob: "God help me if you ever mistreat my daughters! You'll live to regret it!"

There is nothing sweet about this goodbye. Jacob and Laban have not trusted each other since the morning that Jacob awoke to find in his marriage bed not Rachel, but Leah. The two men have maneuvered and out-maneuvered each other. Also, Rachel and Leah have bitterly competed with one another for the favor of their shared husband. They have given their maids to him, repeating Sarah's offense with Hagar. Somehow, the Lord has been at work in this dumpster fire of a family! It seems that God is not one to let "perfect be the enemy of good enough."

Covenants aren't always testaments to sweet relations, or of a partnership between the Holy God and moral people. Covenants testify to God's faithful purposes through flawed servants, and to the commitments of two people to do the best they can to stay on their own side of the fence.

Not until the death of the Savior would it become thinkable that such a dividing wall could be torn down. Such is the righteousness of Christ, that God's perfect faithfulness might draw Jacob and Laban together, or Jews and Greeks, or slaves and free, or even you and your foe.

### RESPOND

What fence in your life could be scaled only by Christ?

### PRAY

*Faithful God, give me the honesty to name the relationships in which we've built fences. Give me the faith to acknowledge just how miraculous it would be to have those fences torn down. Give me the hope to imagine that possibility, as a witness to the Lordship of Jesus. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13

## READ

Genesis 32

## REFLECT

Jacob prepares for an encounter with his brother, Esau, an encounter he fears. Jacob's actions and deceptions 22 years prior resulted in Esau's loss of his birthright as the firstborn son of their father, Isaac. Esau had responded with anger, and Jacob's fear that his brother would kill him had caused Jacob to flee and live in a foreign land. In Haran, Jacob lives and is protected from Esau's wrath, and he receives from God blessings and abundant possessions.

Now, Jacob prepares to return to the home of his birth and to seek his brother's forgiveness and reconciliation with his brother. He assumes that his relationship with Esau has not improved during his long absence. Jacob prepares abundant gifts for his brother as a sign of his remorse and desire to gain his brother's favor.

Then Jacob prays to God, the God of his fathers. Then Jacob confesses his sin and that he is not worthy of how God has blessed him and shown to Jacob His steadfast love and faithfulness. Jacob takes his fears to God and confesses that he fears his brother's wrath and that Esau will kill Jacob and his wives and children. Jacob seeks God's continuing protection and guidance and reminds God of His promises to bless Jacob and make his offspring as the sand of the sea.

Jacob arises from his prayer purified and ready to face, with God's help, the challenges the night and the following day will present. Jacob will find that God's blessings in his life will continue to abound.

## RESPOND

What are your fears? What sins do you need to confess to God? Do you need to seek forgiveness from another and reconciliation? Bring to God in prayer your fears and your need for God's protection, confessions of your sin and your desire for guidance from God. Receive God's forgiveness and arise from your prayer with the assurance that your prayers have been heard by your faithful God.

## PRAY

*Thank You, dear God, for Your steadfast love and mercy. You know our sins and we confess them to You. Help us to receive Your forgiveness with gratitude. Help us to see where we have sinned against others and help us to confess these sins and seek reconciliation and restored relationships. Guide us in all ways. Great is Your faithfulness. We thank You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

THURSDAY, MAY 14

## READ

Genesis 33

## REFLECT

In a book filled with dark valleys of human depravity and unfaithfulness, Genesis 33 stands out as one of the few high points. As we've read, Jacob has swindled his older brother Esau out of his inheritance. He's fled, started a family, and grown a nice little business empire. Life in exile isn't so bad after all.

But God doesn't let Jacob sail off in to his version of happily-ever-after. God says to Jacob in no uncertain terms, "Return to your country and to your kindred..." (Genesis 32:9). Well, there goes the good life. You can tell from the beginning of Genesis 33 that Jacob dreads this family reunion with his big brother. He is in the wrong, and he is justly due the wrath of Esau. But, we've got to give Jacob a little credit, he obeys the Lord's command and returns home.

For a brief moment the old Jacob seems to be winning out. It looks like he is taking up position at the very back of his household caravan. But verse 3 signals that even Jacob is capable of change, "He himself went on before them..." This is good news for all of us hoping and longing to be a better version of ourselves.

God makes Jacob face his past mistakes and failures head on. God doesn't let Jacob avoid his sinful past. And God doesn't allow us to either. But here is the surprise part: God intends to use this confrontation for Jacob's good. God doesn't simply want Jacob to "face the music" so to speak. Remember Genesis 32:9 from above? Well, it ends like this, "Return to your country and to your kindred, *that I may do you good.*"

## RESPOND

What trail of tears have you left in your life? What wrongs have you committed? What "country and kindred" might the Lord be calling you to return to so that He might do you good? In light of the forgiveness on offer by the power of Christ's cross, we can trust that God can redeem our past wayward path.

## PRAY

*Jesus, in You no life is so sinful that it can't see and experience holy change. Jesus, in You no relationship is so broken that You can't work a miracle of reconciliation. Jesus, in You no past is so battered and broken that it can't be used for Your glory and for my good. Jesus, Your love is enough. Amen.*

FRIDAY, MAY 15

## READ

Genesis 34:1-31

## REFLECT

The narrative of Dinah's defilement and her brother's response is as satisfying as stories of tragedy and revenge can be. There is an atrocious act committed against Dinah. It is a moral atrocity on behalf of Shechem which has great religious implications for Israel. The sons of Jacob enact a bit of deceit in the most clever of ways. They leverage their religious act to seduce a foreign people to join their people; an act that will make them vulnerable. Then, once they have their enemy in a compromised position, they kill, steal, and plunder. It can be read as an incredibly satisfying outcome for those reading on behalf of Israel's honor. It isn't until the end of the narrative that the voice of Jacob invites his sons to consider that perhaps they have made an unwise decision. Jacob is concerned about how their actions have put him and his household in a vulnerable position. In the narrative we never hear from Dinah. I do wonder what Dinah would have said of her own experience. What sort of response did Dinah desire? Was she pleased with her brother's actions? Too ashamed to care? We may never know.

In the text, Jacob's sons prioritize their disgust for the wrong done against their sister. Levi and Simeon's response to their father makes this clear when he tells them they have made him vulnerable, they respond, "should we allow our sister to be treated like a whore?" I heard another pastor this week say, compassion is more powerful than disgust. Compassion literally means to suffer with. I wonder, what sort of response would be possible if they chose to suffer with their sister Dinah, to have compassion with her? Certainly, the act of compassion is an act of God towards all humanity. God did not prioritize his disgust for sin. The good news is that God chose, in Jesus, to show compassion upon all people.

The first we hear from God in the narrative is in chapter 35, when he says, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." God calls Jacob and his household back to God's house, to remember the grace and protection that God had shown Jacob some time before. At the communion table we are given the opportunity to remember the life of the blood shed and the body broken of our savior; an act of compassion that we proclaim nourishes the people of God. May we remember the work of God, and prioritize compassion at every turn.

*(cont.)*

## DAY 34

FRIDAY, MAY 15 *(cont.)*

### RESPOND

Who do you show compassion to? Who do you find disgusting? When God calls you to remember, where and when do you return to? Who might God be calling you to show compassion towards this season?

### PRAY

*God of grace and mercy, power and might, look upon us with compassion, and work in our hearts everything needed to look upon others with compassion in our world; that Your Kingdom may come. Amen.*

SATURDAY, MAY 16

## READ

Genesis 35

## REFLECT

Jacob's return to Bethel, where he first encountered God and received the promises, is a crucial renewing and cleansing event. Jacob's homecoming to Canaan has not been free from evil. The reconciliation with Esau fell short. The rape of Dinah with Simeon and Levi's revenge demonstrate the difficulty of living a faithful life among the Canaanites. God asks Jacob to go on a pilgrimage to the place where Jacob discovered that God was with him, Bethel. For Jacob to live faithfully, he must discover an alternative way to live instead of the Canaanite worldly culture. The journey to renewal is renunciation, reclothing, and renaming. First, the renunciation was putting away the foreign gods. Second, the reclothing was to purify him. The result is the renaming of Jacob to Israel, the one who strives with God. To strive with God is not to walk the way of the world but to receive the promises of God and to follow God's commands. Jacob has made a ritual journey that has led him back to the God that never left him.

## RESPOND

Today, how can we strive with God and not follow the way of our culture? When Martin Luther faced the evil in the world, he would declare, "Remember your baptism." Baptism is a sacrament of renunciation, reclothing, and renaming. Paul says, "Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God..." Ephesians 4:22-25. In baptism we renounce evil, put on Christ, and are given the name, beloved child of God.

## PRAY

*Gracious loving heavenly Father, help us to turn away from the ways of the world by putting on the nature of Christ and fulfilling our calling as Your forgiven beloved child. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*