

**Week 8, Sunday: Jacob, Esau, and the Birthright**  
**Genesis 27:1 - 28:9**

**For Journaling or Discussing with Another:**

Read Genesis 27:1-29

- What are your impressions of Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob?
- Why do you think Rebekah conspires with Jacob? Whose future do you think she has most her in mind: hers? Jacobs? their tribe and descendants?
- How do we bless children?

Read Genesis 27:30-40

- Recall a story of intrigue, deception, or disfunction in your own family or extended family. What blessings and/or curses have ensued?
- Where do you sense God has been in your own family story?

Read Genesis 27:41 - 28:9

- What are consequences of the deception found here (for each of the characters)?
- Where is God in all of this?

For further reflection: Go back two chapters and reread Genesis 25:19-34 (Thursday of Week 7 in this devotional resource). Someone might ask, “Why should Jacob the cheat get to continue as the chosen son, where’s the justice?” Looking back, we find the story responding:

- Because a bold leader is needed, and Jacob has demonstrated boldness since birth.
- Because the elder brother is foolish, hot headed, and not all that bright and we need more from our leaders.
- Because although the fathers hold primary power in the story, the mothers may hold the wisdom and Rebekah favors Jacob.
- Because this is God’s story! God has foreseen Jacob’s rise and God is working in and through him.

Where do we find echoes of this story in our families, churches, and society now?

Continued blessings engaging Genesis,      Tom Maehl, First Lutheran Church, Waltham, MA

## Week 8, Monday: Jacob's Dream

**Scripture:** Genesis 28:10-22

*Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the LORD stood beside him and said, 'I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.' Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!' And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'*

*So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you.'*

**Reflection:** Jacob the conniver and cheat now receives a blessed encounter with God, and he is changed. God appears in a dream and speaks words of promise. In the middle of the promise are these words, “*Know that I am with you.*” This is the ultimate blessing, God's own presence! Jacob is filled with such gratitude and wonder that he responds by marking the spot with a stone, renaming the place Bethel (meaning “house of God”), and pledging his allegiance to God.

We know that we cannot produce or orchestrate events such as these, where God's presence is strongly felt. God will be God. However, the story is showing us something about the kind of characters that God seems to prefer; namely, imperfect people who will, nevertheless, engage all the complexities of life with an ample measure of trust in God to lead and provide.

### **To Ponder:**

- Recall a time when you had a sense of God's presence. What do you think God may have been trying to communicate with you in the experience?
- How have you responded to a powerful or puzzling dream?
- How is your allegiance to God expressed?

**Prayer:** Gracious Spirit, Christ promised that your power would be at work in and among us. May in be so with me. Come to me in waking moments or dreams, as you see fit. Give me vision to see, boldness to follow, and wisdom to mark significant events so that I may neither forget them nor you. Amen.

## Week 8, Tuesday: The Deceiver Deceived

**Scripture:** Genesis 29:1-30

*Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. As he looked, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.*

*Jacob said to them, 'My brothers, where do you come from?' They said, 'We are from Haran.' He said to them, 'Do you know Laban son of Nahor?' They said, 'We do.' He said to them, 'Is it well with him?' 'Yes,' they replied, 'and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep.' He said, 'Look, it is still broad daylight; it is not time for the animals to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them.' But they said, 'We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.'*

*While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother's brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of his mother's brother Laban. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father.*

*When Laban heard the news about his sister's son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, 'Surely you are my bone and my flesh!' And he stayed with him for a month.*

*Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?' Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, 'I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.' Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.' So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.*

*Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.' So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?' Laban said, 'This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.' Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years.*

**Reflection:** There is an old saying, “What goes around, comes around;” that is, there are consequences for our selfish behaviors. Earlier, Jacob selfishly took advantage of his father’s blindness and deceived him into giving him the cherished blessing normally due the eldest son. In so doing he cheated his brother Esau, then fled. Now he has come into the territory of his wife’s brother Laban. Laban would have learned about Jacob’s deception (not many family secrets remain secret); and he uses this knowledge for a deception of his own. First, he takes advantage of Jacob’s ‘blind’ passion and tricks him into taking his older daughter Leah as his first wife. Then when Jacob protests, Laban speaks words of feigned innocence laced with cunning innuendo, “Why it is not done in *our* country, blessing the younger before the elder.” Jacob is trapped by his own guilt and resigns with the pledge of another seven years of labor for his beloved Rachel. The deceiver has been deceived.

Where is God in this? Is this punishment from God who is always at work behind the scenes in Genesis? We do not know, for the story does not say so. It is clear, however, that selfish schemes and lies do tend to add complications to life.

This story may serve as a bit of a warning, God is still at work behind the scenes of our stories too. The wise know this. In Proverbs 9:10 we read, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,*” and Proverbs 19:23 reads, “*The fear of the LORD is life indeed; filled with it one rests secure and suffers no harm.*” We need not be afraid of God; God loves us, forgives us, walks with us! Nevertheless, we do live in a world created by God where there are consequences, complications, resulting from sinful behavior.

**To Ponder:** Martin Luther once said that whatever you love the most, trust the most, and *fear* the most is your God. How has a healthy “Fear of the Lord,” led you down right pathways, helping you to make decisions? Conversely, when has a selfish decision complicated your life?

**Prayer:** Continue to reassure me of your love and presence, O Lord, in order that my faith might be deepened. Give me such faith that I might resist the temptation to selfishly scheme or cheat trusting in you for my future. Amen.

## Week 8, Wednesday: Complex Community

**Scripture:** Genesis 29:31-30:24

*When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben; for she said, 'Because the LORD has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me.' She conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also'; and she named him Simeon. Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, 'Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons'; therefore he was named Levi. She conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'This time I will praise the LORD'; therefore she named him Judah; then she ceased bearing.*

*When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or I shall die!' Jacob became very angry with Rachel and said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?' Then she said, 'Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I too may have children through her.' So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife; and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, 'God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son'; therefore she named him Dan. Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, 'With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed'; so she named him Naphtali.*

*When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Then Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, 'Good fortune!' so she named him Gad. Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. And Leah said, 'Happy am I! For the women will call me happy'; so she named him Asher.*

*In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.' But she said to her, 'Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?' Rachel said, 'Then he may lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes.' When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said, 'You must come in to me; for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes.' So he lay with her that night. And God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, 'God has given me my hire because I gave my maid to my husband'; so she named him Issachar. And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, 'God has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will honour me, because I have borne him six sons'; so she named him Zebulun. Afterwards she bore a daughter, and named her Dinah.*

*Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, 'God has taken away my reproach'; and she named him Joseph, saying, 'May the LORD add to me another son!'*

**Reflection:** Such sad family dynamics. Listen again to:

Leah after her first child,

*“Surely now my husband will love me,”*

Leah after her second child,

*“Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me a second son.”*

Rachel who envied her sister and said to Jacob,

*“Give me children, or I shall die!”*

Bilhah and Zilpah the maids,

No wait, we cannot for they are silent!

As maids they don’t even have the right to name their own children.

One unloved, one filled with envy, two silenced – how sad. Yet it is this family God is choosing to work through in order to extend God’s promise. These sons, with one more to be born later, will become the heads of the tribes of Israel. Much later Jesus will be born, a descendant of Judah, Leah’s fourth born; and through him we have been adopted into this family. These then are our ancestors. We are part of an ongoing story where God continues to work, in unpredictable ways, in and through messy human dynamics.

In Revelation chapter 21 the metaphor of marriage is used, and the Church is described as the bride of Christ. This is referring to the whole Christian Church in all its expressions, though we mostly experience Church in the context of individual congregations. Congregations can be places of blessed, caring relationships; yet congregations can also be places of sad family dynamics too.

**To Ponder:** Reflect on your own Church community:

- Who like Leah might be experiencing feelings of being unloved?
- Who like Rachel might be deeply troubled over life’s disappointments?
- Who like Bilhah and Zilpah are silenced or unheard?
- Is there someone you feel led to connect with?

**Prayer:** Help me O God, to be an agent of peace and reconciliation in my own family, congregation, and community. Give me eyes to notice those who are isolated, ears to listen to those who are often silent, courage to resist unhealthy dynamics, and a heart kept warm with the expectation that you continue to be at work in surprising ways. Amen.

## Week 8, Thursday: Jacob Blessed

**Scripture:** Genesis 30:25-43

*When Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, ‘Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know very well the service I have given you.’ But Laban said to him, ‘If you will allow me to say so, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you; name your wages, and I will give them.’ Jacob said to him, ‘You yourself know how I have served you, and how your cattle have fared with me. For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly; and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?’ He said, ‘What shall I give you?’ Jacob said, ‘You shall not give me anything; if you will do this for me, I will again feed your flock and keep it: let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and such shall be my wages. So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen.’ Laban said, ‘Good! Let it be as you have said.’ But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in charge of his sons; and he set a distance of three days’ journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was pasturing the rest of Laban’s flock.*

*Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the rods. He set the rods that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering-places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, the flocks bred in front of the rods, and so the flocks produced young that were striped, speckled, and spotted. Jacob separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and the completely black animals in the flock of Laban; and he put his own droves apart, and did not put them with Laban’s flock. Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob laid the rods in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the rods, but for the feebler of the flock he did not lay them there; so the feebler were Laban’s, and the stronger Jacob’s. Thus the man grew exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, and male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys.*

**Reflection:** Jacob is now the one upon whom the promise centers. Speckled sheep, spotted goats, changing wages – Laban learns (like Lot learned earlier in his experience with Abraham) that no matter what he does ‘the one upon whom the promise centers’ will prosper for God is with them. Also, in this episode it becomes clear that over time it is not just that one *flock* will become strong and the other feeble, but one *person* will become strong, Jacob, and the other feeble, Laban.

Some in our day presume that riches are still a clear sign of God’s favor and may turn to Bible stories like this one to undergird their belief. This, however, jumps from the world of Genesis to our present world bypassing the witness of Jesus. Jesus had no land, no descendants, and no earthly riches. What Jesus did have, however, was an intimate relationship with God. Jesus was trusting in God for everything! This trust freed him from the need of wealth and the ensuing anxiety that comes with it; and in the end God provided – everything! The resurrected Jesus is now the one upon whom the promise centers. We are welcomed into his flock, and his flock (whether speckled or spotted) becomes strong.

**To Ponder:** Of life’s blessings, which have come to you because you are part of Christ’s body?

**Prayer:** Thank you Lord Jesus for claiming me as one of your sheep. Hold me, lead me. Amen.

## Week 8, Friday: Jacob's Discernment

**Scripture:** Genesis 31

*Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, 'Jacob has taken all that was our father's; he has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father.' And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him as favorably as he did before. Then the LORD said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you.' So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, and said to them, 'I see that your father does not regard me as favorably as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. You know that I have served your father with all my strength; yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me. If he said, "The speckled shall be your wages", then all the flock bore speckled; and if he said, "The striped shall be your wages", then all the flock bore striped. Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father, and given them to me.*

*During the mating of the flock I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats that leaped upon the flock were striped, speckled, and mottled. Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, "Jacob," and I said, "Here I am!" And he said, "Look up and see that all the goats that leap on the flock are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and return to the land of your birth." ' Then Rachel and Leah answered him, 'Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. All the property that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you.'*

*So Jacob arose, and set his children and his wives on camels; and he drove away all his livestock, all the property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.*

*Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods. And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. So he fled with all that he had; starting out he crossed the Euphrates, and set his face towards the hill country of Gilead.*

*On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. So he took his kinsfolk with him and pursued him for seven days until he caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night, and said to him, 'Take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad.'*

*Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsfolk camped in the hill country of Gilead. Laban said to Jacob, 'What have you done? You have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword. Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre. And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? What you have done is foolish. It is in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father spoke*

to me last night, saying, “Take heed that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.” Even though you had to go because you longed greatly for your father’s house, why did you steal my gods?’ Jacob answered Laban, ‘Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsfolk, point out what I have that is yours, and take it.’ Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

So Laban went into Jacob’s tent, and into Leah’s tent, and into the tent of the two maids, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah’s tent, and entered Rachel’s. Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel’s saddle, and sat on them. Laban felt all about in the tent, but did not find them. And she said to her father, ‘Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me.’ So he searched, but did not find the household gods.

Then Jacob became angry, and upbraided Laban. Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is my offence? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? Although you have felt about through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsfolk and your kinsfolk, so that they may decide between us two. These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. That which was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself; of my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. It was like this with me: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you for fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night.’

Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, ‘The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about their children whom they have borne? Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me.’ So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar. And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, ‘Gather stones,’ and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap. Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. Laban said, ‘This heap is a witness between you and me today.’ Therefore he called it Galeed, and the pillar Mizpah, for he said, ‘The LORD watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other. If you ill-treat my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, though no one else is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me.’

Then Laban said to Jacob, ‘See this heap and see the pillar, which I have set between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor—the God of their father—‘judge between us.’ So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the height and called his kinsfolk to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all night in the hill country.

Early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them; then he departed and returned home.

**Reflection:** It is time to move on. Dealing with Uncle Laban has become exasperating for Jacob and his family. It's not only that Laban is greedy, in a way his obsession over wealth has made him irrational. After all the Jacob has done over so many years of diligent work, Laban still sees him as a pawn to be manipulated. We can hear the delusion in Laban's words, "These daughters are *my* daughters, these children are *my* children, the flocks are *my* flocks, and all that you see is *mine*." Mine, mine, mine! There can no longer be sane dealings with this money and power obsessed tribal leader. It's time to move on, but where to?

Early in this episode we read that God spoke to Jacob saying, "*Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you.*" Where to? Home! Given how poorly Jacob has been treated by Laban, he may have considered returning home many times before; however, home is where Esau still resides, the brother whom he 'fleeced.' You may recall that the last time Jacob encountered his brother, Esau was intent on killing him. Now Jacob must choose whether to stay with Uncle Laban, go to new uncharted territory, or return home to face Esau.

How did Jacob muster the courage to go? Perhaps by reminding himself over and over of how God had been with him all along. Listen again to Jacob's own words (underlined in the first paragraph above), "The God of my Father has been with me," "God did not permit Laban to harm me," "God has taken the livestock from him and given them to me." Mindful of God's past blessings, Jacob now risks going forward in trust that God will continue to be with him.

**To Ponder:**

- How has God been with you in past times of struggle?
- What challenge lie ahead of you that require a measure of courage?

**Prayer:** What comfort it is, O God, knowing that you are with me. Lead me through the challenges of this day; and help me navigate my continued journey trusting that you will be with me tomorrow. Amen.