

Monday March 8, 2021
Read Genesis 1

First Things First

“In the beginning, God created...” Those are the first words of the Book of Genesis. Those are the first words of the Bible. Those words set the stage for all of human history. Actually, “setting the stage” is an apt description.

What is to follow is the grand, historic drama of God and His relationship to His Creation, in particular, humanity. So if you really want to understand all that follows, you need to know that **“in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”** If you really want to understand yourself, the world that surrounds you, you have to set the stage of this drama with the knowledge that **“in the beginning, God created.”**

We sometimes lose sight of this first reality of the Scriptures. God is the Creator. He is the giver of life. He is the foundation of life. He made you. He made the ground that is under your feet. He made every substance that was used to shape the device that is delivering this devotion to you. *We* don't really create things. We just shape them and mix them together. He makes it all.

And so, from the very first words of Scripture, we see His grace. No one compels God to create. This is His nature – to make life, to give life through His creative Word. Through time, we see this as His drama unfolds across the Scriptures. He creates by His Word. He establishes His own people – through His Word. He forgives and judges and calls to repentance and makes new through His Word. His Word will even take on our flesh to make us new. No moment, no action, no person, nothing will ever take place outside of His gracious creation. We may ignore His work, demean it, damage it, but never for a moment exist outside of it.

From the start of His story, if we are to understand anything that follows, first things first – we must know Him as the gracious Creator of life.

Prayer – Dear God, help me see myself and Your whole creation as expressions of Your grace. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday March 9, 2021

Read Genesis 2

God Blessed Adam

God blessed Adam! He made a world, full of interesting things (plants, animals, places). God gave Him duties to keep him busy and give a point to his life. God gave him instructions, to know what his duties were and to protect him from special dangers! God even let him explore this world so that Adam knew loneliness and that there should be a partner for him as well as the animals. Yes, God blessed Adam.

When Adam understood his need for a partner, God gave him that partner, know that Adam was ready to accept her as such. So, Adam met Eve and realized that here he was complete.

I am so like Adam! God has blessed me, beyond any real expectation. Now Adam was made perfect, but I have inherited the rebellious nature of my ancestors. I am not only don't deserve a nice special world, I deserve nothing good, because I came into being with a rebellious antagonistic attitude towards God.

But God has given me my life anyway. God has provided for me, as He provides the rain for the just and the unjust. I have been given an upbringing teaching me about my duties and needs in life. I have been taught about my needs for others. I too have been blessed like Adam.

How do I use my blessings?! Does God living with me cause me to see the opportunities to share with others, to give to others a small blessing acting here for God?

Prayer: Father in heaven. I thank you for the many blessing you shower on me daily, even when I fail to recognize them. Please teach me to appreciate them - and to share them with others as You do with me. In Jesus name, Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

Read Genesis 3

The Curse and The Promise

UGH. Everything was perfect. UGH. Everything was just the way it was meant to be. You just HAD to do that, didn't you??

Genesis 3 is a chapter in the bible that is so important. We see the first temptation of man, we see the serpent going to Adam and Eve and playing with their minds. He puts the doubt into their minds about what God said. Did He ACTUALLY say you shouldn't eat from that tree? You won't DIE! God only said that so you wouldn't be like Him!

And Eve took the bait. She ate the fruit. But something we often miss is that her husband, Adam, **who was with her**, also ate. They both fell into Satan's temptation and were immediately made aware that they were naked. They were ashamed and made themselves loincloths.

And even though they had the capability to walk with God and talk, they hid. And God found them. After God asks them why they're hiding, Adam starts the blame game. "The woman whom YOU gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit and I ate." God turns to Eve, and she blames Satan.

But then in verses 14 and 15, we see not only the curse of the serpent, but even amidst that curse, we see the first promise of the Messiah.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; **he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.**"

The serpent is cursed, and the offspring of the woman will **CRUSH his head**. Even here in just the 3rd chapter of Genesis, we have the promise of a Savior, a promise, of **JESUS**.

But it isn't without pain and suffering for Adam, Eve, and their children, you and I. Pain in childbearing. Thorns and thistles. Pain here on the earth, because of the original sin that Adam and Eve committed.

But we can never forget verse 15. That even though we can and will have pain here on earth because of that original sin, even here in the Garden of Eden, God promises a Messiah, a Savior.

Prayer—Gracious Lord, You promised Your Son Jesus to Adam and Eve, and we have seen that fulfillment in Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the dead. Remind us that even when we face pains and struggles here on the earth, that our place in eternity is set with you. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Read Genesis 4:1-16

Doing Well

"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." (Genesis 4:7)

Has someone asked you, "how you are doing?" and quickly answer, "doing well"? This happens to me almost daily, and my reply usually goes without thought. Maybe we have all tried to hide our "wellness status" or anger and try to *do well* by efforts and thoughts. In our sins and apart from Christ, our actions are not *well*, our thoughts are not *favorable* and *good*, holy, perfect, and righteous. We often do things we do not like, and our thoughts are not loving or *doing well* toward others and God. Jesus explains our unwellness; **"what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person"** (Matthew 15:18). God's Word confirms, **"For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin"** (Romans 14:23).

In our text, the expectation of the promised Messiah "offspring" to "bruise the head of the serpent" (Genesis 3:15) by the "conception and birth of Cain" may have been assumed by Adam and Eve, "I have gotten a man, the LORD" (v. 1). And to be fair, maybe not. The fulfillment of the Messiah, Son of God, to tabernacle in the flesh and conquer sin and death by His blood shed for us on the cross was still to come. And today, we see the Kingdom of God fulfilled in **"Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel"** (Hebrews 12:24)

Doing well can only come from God that *"rules over sin"* through faith. **"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks"** (Hebrews 11:4). The Apostle John writes, **"We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous"** (1 John 3:12). God's perfect and holy Law has shown us our inability to *do well* and keep God's Law. And by faith in Christ alone, "the seed of the woman" crucified and risen on our behalf who fulfilled the Law for us, we are declared righteous and forgiven for His sake, and through Him alone, *do well*.

Prayer – LORD God. Thank You for *doing well* for us in Christ Jesus, our life and hope. Help us to live in You as You live in us through faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday, March 12, 2021

Read Genesis 4:17-26

The Foundation

Eve bore to Adam a son named Seth, which means foundation as verse 25 explains that God founded/established/set up (or as ESV has, appointed) offspring for Eve in the place of Abel. We cannot imagine the grief of Eve at the death of her son Abel. She had been told that she and Adam were dust and to dust they would return, but she had never experienced the death of another person before. And this first brush with death was none other than her son being murdered at the hands of her other son. To add to the great misery of outliving her son, Eve, she probably thought that one of these offspring would be the one to crush the head of the serpent and undo the sin that she and Adam had done. Now rather than two potential saviors for sons, Eve had a murderer and a corpse. She was probably thinking not of the Lord's curse to the serpent that her son would crush him, but the Lord's curse to her that she would bring forth children in pain, knowing that the pain would not cease when the birth was over. Yet in the midst of her grief, the Lord showed mercy to Eve and she was given another son, Seth.

Prophetically, Seth's name rings true as the one whom God has set up or appointed because through the line of Seth came Noah and through him all the people of the world, but especially the offspring of Eve who would fulfill the promise in the garden. Where the first Adam failed to be a righteous human, the first son of Eve failed to be the savior, and the first Israel failed to be faithful to God, Jesus Christ was born to fulfill all of these half-kept promises in full. Seth was born as the foundation that led to Christ, who Himself became the new Seth, the very foundation of our faith.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, from the foundation of the world, You have set out to save us. We thank you for Your great mercy in giving and fulfilling Your promises. We thank you that through Seth, You gave to us Jesus Christ Who is our true foundation. Teach us to build only on Him, to make Christ the unshakeable bedrock of our hope.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, March 13, 2021

Read Genesis 5:1-14

The Generations of Adam

Genealogies. Not too exciting stuff. Especially in the Bible, where you can't even read them – silently – without hurting your mouth. But Genesis is full of them. This isn't the first; that was in 2:4: **"These are the generations of the heavens and the earth"**. Bet you didn't know that the earth had a genealogy, did you? But in Hebrew, the word for "earth" is "adamah" and Adam (Hebrew for "Man") was made by God out of earth. Genesis is unique in using the word "generations" to mark the beginning of a new section. This one follows Creation and the Fall and leads up to the Flood.

What struck me about this reading is the contrast with Chapter 1. Remember how each day of Creation ended? **"It was good"** was God's pronouncement on His Creation. God created **"good"** every single day – on the sixth day it was even **"very good"**. But here, in the **"Book of the generations of Adam,"** each section ends quite differently.

The first verse tells us, **"When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God."** Adam, before sin, knew God perfectly. He was holy – the "likeness" of God. And, before they took their walk to the tree of the forbidden fruit and sinned, Adam and Eve literally walked with God in Paradise. But, **"when Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness"**. Seth, being born in the image of Adam, was a sinner and did not know God perfectly.

This reading only covers the first five generations of Adam (the rest will follow on Monday), but as you read it the pattern is plain: **"The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters."** This pattern continues for Seth's son Enosh, his son Kenan, and his son Mahalalel. Then the pattern continues by telling how many years they each lived and closes with **"...and he died."**

Adam died. Seth died. Enosh died. And so on. The Generations of God the Creator always ended in **"good"** or **"very good"**! But the generations of Man all end in – death. That would be totally depressing and could only drive us to despair if not for the beautiful message hidden in these genealogies: they all follow the bloodline leading to...Jesus! And Jesus is the offspring of Eve that would crush the head of death. He died to put an end to death and rose to show us our future!

Prayer: Lord God, by Your Spirit I know You, although imperfectly in this life. Restore Your image in me so that I may walk with You in Paradise. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday March 15, 2021

Read Genesis 5:15-32

He Called His Name Noah

“Lamech...called his name Noah, saying ‘Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.’”

Every parent has a certain amount of hopes and dreams for a child, but Lamech’s desire is pretty extraordinary. Noah is described as a second Adam with the reference to **“out of the ground,”** just as Adam was formed from the dust of the earth. Not only this, Noah’s name means “he shall bring us relief.” Relief from what? **“Our work and from the painful toil of our hands.”**

In the chapters that lie ahead, we will see that Noah is a second Adam. The whole world will be begun again after the worldwide flood. All humanity will be not just children of Adam, but also children of Noah, as only his family remains.

Yet Noah will carry the condition that Adam unleashed on the world. The anchor of sin will not sink the ark, but it will sink Noah. Nevertheless, through Noah’s ancestor relief will come – from sin, from pain, from toil. Jesus will be a greater Adam who will finally crush the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15) AND a greater Noah to bring everlasting relief AND make all things new.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, by Your merciful forgiveness, give me true relief. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday March 16, 2021

Read Genesis 6:1-8

The Search for Success

The world is so tempting! Ask those people who lived in the days of Noah. They thought they knew everything; they were so sure that their temptations were real! Here I am following God, listening to his Word, trusting in His promises. But those others? They seem to get all kinds of benefits from their ignoring God.

They push God away, stealing from their neighbors, harming or even killing inconvenient bystanders, always looking out for themselves, always grabbing anything to keep. How they crow about what they have, how they boast about their sins!

Still, I know that whatever they have, however much they look successful, they will face God's judgment. Sometimes they find God's reactions in this life, sometimes they face His judgment in death. God has patience but they stretch past it. God's promises include restoring the balance of justice.

Justice cuts down the evildoer, reduces their "successes" to nothing! Justice was done on the cross for me - my justice was paid by Jesus! I admit it, I am no better than those others. They glory in their rebellion against God - and pay their price. But I am sorry, recognizing that I deserve punishment - and it occurs! It is just that my Savior stepped in my place.

I look at those others - and pity fills my thoughts. They get so little and die trying to hang on to what is worthless. I thank my Lord, He gave me so much, and I receive it as a gift (my trying was worthless also!). Yes, pity for them - and thanksgiving to my Savior. Thank you.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus. Thank you for bringing me away from that search for success in the world. And, please, pity those others, grant to them the gift of faith that they too may turn away from useless selfishness. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday March 17, 2021

Read Genesis 6:9-22

Noah's Covenant

Have you ever thought of how crazy people must have thought Noah was? If he had told the people around him what exactly God had told him to do?? It would have been a wild, WILD comment that he would have had to make to people.

God informs Noah in verse 13, that He is going to destroy all flesh, but not Noah and his family. And God commands Noah to build an ark. He said to make an ark that was about 510 feet long, 55 feet wide, and 51 feet high. (Measurements are taken from the Ark Encounter in Kentucky) That's over a football field and a half long!! This would be a HUGE ark.

God gives him the rest of the instructions here in Genesis 6. He gives him the exact way to make it, and then explains why.

In verses 17-21, we hear God speaking to Noah, and His reasonings for sending the flood, and what will happen after the flood. God tells Noah that He will bring the flood **to destroy all the flesh on the earth**. Which is probably hard for Noah to hear, knowing that the evil and wickedness there is going to be this flood.

BUT!!

God also explains in verse 18, that He will establish the covenant with Noah, and He will save Noah, and his family and two of each livestock. And Noah breathed the biggest sigh of relief! And you and I can too.

The covenant that God makes with Noah, **we are also a part of**. Initially, that covenant is with Noah, with the people of Israel, His chosen nation, but as we walk through Lent, we look forward to the defining moment, the moment **that brings all of us into that covenant**. Noah and his family were saved from the flood, by the ark, and you and I are saved from the wrath of God, through Christ.

Prayer—Gracious Lord, thank you for saving Noah and his family, and bringing us into that covenant with You through Your Son. Help us to grow closer to You and continue to watch over us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday March 18, 2021

Read Genesis 7:1-24

The Washing of the Earth

“He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.” Genesis 7:21

God’s patience is seen up to this point among violent sin and corruption that had infected all mankind upon the earth. Yet, Noah was seen righteous in the sight of and before Yahweh. Yahweh saved and preserved Noah and his family by promise through means of the ark made of wood in which they entered upon God’s command. Noah and his family and all the pairs of animals appointed by the LORD, clean and unclean, floated on the water rising above the earth while every living thing was blotted out or destroyed and “washed away” upon the earth. This true account in God’s Word teaches us of Baptism. How?

The Apostle Peter writes, **“God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”** (1 Peter 3:20-21).

In this story, we can see how Noah and his family (and the whole earth!) were impacted during rain for 40 days and nights, rising above the earth through the waters on the ark as all living flesh on the earth was destroyed. The 40 days and nights of Lent serve to impact us by pointing us to Jesus: **“the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus suffered and endured the cross and rose from the dead on the third day. **BLOTTING OUT OUR SINS** so that you may be saved **“by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out richly through Jesus Christ our Savior”** (Titus 3:5-6).

Noah walked with God in repentance and faith. Noah looked forward to the promised offspring/seed of the woman to crush the serpent’s head. Noah believed in the promise of God. And God **“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”** (1 Timothy 2:4). And that Truth is only in Jesus Christ crucified and risen for our sins. Jesus brings us to our loving Father through His Word and Baptism. On account of Christ, we are seen as righteous before Yahweh God and preserved in His righteousness.

Prayer – Thank You, LORD. For Your great mercy and forgiveness given for us in Baptism through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday, March 19, 2021

Read Genesis 8:1-19

Safe Through the Flood

What a picture of mercy we have! **“God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark.”** Narratively, we aren't very surprised to see that God still cares about humans since humanity is at center stage of this story.

Upon further reflection, though, it's incredible that the Creator of the universe would remember any particular thing. The universe is a vast, vast place and we are but an insignificant mote in God's grand scheme. If God acted according to our way of thinking, He would have wiped out the world in the flood and forgotten about us.

But God had made a promise of salvation to His creation, and He keeps His promises. So, our God is mindful of us and remembers us in the midst of danger. Our world is not flooded with water as Noah's was, but it is flooded with sin and death. And like Noah's flood, God promises that He will preserve His faithful and that one day the flood will subside.

Here and throughout history, we see pictures of how God will act to save His people, but what we have in Noah's story is only a shadow of what we have in Christ. Where Noah had to send birds to search for dry land and saw only an olive leaf, the smallest sign of peace, we have an entire tree as a sign of our peace: the cross of Christ. In our baptism, we are brought safely through the flood of evil and sin in our world and will one day emerge safely with all flesh to enjoy a world cleansed from sin and evil.

Prayer: Lord of creation, we thank You that You have not forgotten us or abandoned us, but have remembered us and protected us through the flood of death. Teach us to look to You in every trouble and call upon Your name, trusting that You will give us peace in the cross of Christ. Give us hope to look toward the day when the flood of evil will recede and You bring us out to enjoy creation as You intended it. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday March 20th

Read [Genesis 8:20-9:17](#)

“And This Just In”



Friday, near the Meramec

(Whopp! Whopp! Whopp! Whopp!) “Good Morning. This is Michael Angelos, reporting for Gabriel News, channel 3, at the Ark on Mount Ararat. For the last seven days, Noah and his family have been herding an endless stream of animals (that, plainly speaking, stink to high heaven!) out of the Ark, and now it looks like they’re all out. Noah has sacrificed some animals on an altar, and that smell is heavenly!”

“But wait, now – the LORD is about to speak. A hush has fallen over the crowd – even the monkeys appear to be listening expectantly! He says... He will never, I repeat, never again curse the entire earth for man’s sin. And I must say, the animals, almost as one, have breathed a giant sigh of relief.”

“He continues to speak – He says He will never interrupt the seasons, especially spring (I believe I heard Him say). Days and nights will not cease as long as the earth itself continues. ...And now, now He’s talking about a covenant that He’s making with Noah and his family. No, no – the covenant is with “all flesh” – those were His exact words – that’s all animals and all people. He says Man is to live and have children and to fill the earth. He is giving to Man all the animals that move. Man is to care for them and now may eat of them.”

“What is that!?! Suddenly there’s a brilliant light in the clouds overhead! It’s amazing! There’s every color in a rainbow in this thing and it’s glowing, almost like it’s on fire, it’s more beautiful than anything I’ve seen! And now, God is saying that that’s the eternal sign of this covenant. Every time we see that brilliant, colorful “bow of light” in the clouds, we are to remember His promise.”

“That seems to be the ending to this chapter of the Good News. The crowd is beginning to go to the four corners of Creation, and God continues to care for His People.”

“Next up in the news, I’ll take you to the flooding on the Meramec, where God is at work...”

Prayer: Lord God, every time I see Your rainbow, I thank You for reminding me of the salvation You have given me through the blood of Your Son. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Happy Spring!

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, March 22, 2021

Read Genesis 9:18-29

Noah is Not The Fix

This is a weird story! Everything up to this point we learned about Noah in Sunday School – building the ark, bringing his family, his sending out the birds, and the discussion of the rainbow. For some reason, this story didn't make it into the regular Sunday School routine.

Noah plants a vineyard. Noah makes some wine. Noah drinks a great deal of wine, and nothing good follows. The Scriptures make it clear that wine is a gift from God, but drunkenness is sinful abuse of that gift. As is often the case, sin multiplies and ripples out. In a drunken stupor, Noah shed his clothes and passed out. His youngest son, Ham, walked in on dad in that compromised condition and immediately told his brothers – expanding the shame of Noah's sin and implicating Ham.

This is a weird story, and yet, very familiar. As was pointed out last week, the flood was to cleanse the earth. But sin still clung even to the heart of God's servant Noah. Such stories are common, as you'll see, in the book of Genesis (not to mention in our lives!). The "heroes" of the faith are anything but perfect. It is good to emulate the faith of Noah, but always remembering Noah's hope was not in himself, but in the One who cleansed the earth and cleanses hearts.

Noah appears in Genesis as something of a new Adam, a new start, but this story reminds us that Noah carries Adam's condition. We need a very different second Adam. As Paul puts it, **"the first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven...Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven"** (1 Cor. 15:47-48). Noah and his descendants are clearly shown to be merely men of dust, like Adam. Yet we take heart in the "man from heaven." Despite our sin and connection to the "man of dust," by faith, we share the life and image of the "man from heaven" – Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, on our own we constantly advance the sin of the generations before us. Forgive us, and strengthen us in the promise that by faith we share in Your perfect life. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

Read Genesis 10:1-14

Our Team

We are all brothers! We share our ancestry. God has blessed us all with life and the goodness of the earth. God has made us mutual support teamers!

But I find that those others don't always support me. I find that I don't like them. How could God let them insult His preparations and His planning by their failures? Shouldn't I treat them as they are treating me? Surely their offenses against God deserve my rejecting them?

How easy I find it to ignore my offenses against God while piling up the evidence for failures of others! How easy it is for me to forget what Jesus has done for me - while I was treating Him like those others. I hold God's gifts to me tightly, making sure that those others don't use mine; I withhold my friendship, fearing that they might not reciprocate, that they might reject me; I don't treat them or recognize them as fellow teamers myself.

This is one of God's gifts to me in Jesus — that I can recognize my own failures, my own sins. Then, living in Him, living His life, then His ways change me. Like Him, I can ignore their failures while with His guidance, support, and power, changing mine. In Him, I can be a true teamer, one who does good for others, even while they take advantage of rejecting God and hurting me.

Living in Christ, my Savior, I rejoice in the opportunities that God gives me to give to others, as He gave to me, as He keeps giving to me — forgiving, giving, freely, generously, at my own expense in effort and things of the world. Thank you, Jesus.

Prayer: Please Lord, remind me always of your love and generosity. Please make that same giving spirit to be in me as well. Thank you for your promise that you can, will, and do so. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

Read Genesis 10:15-32

For All People

“Can I get a volunteer to read our verses for today? There are just a few names! Anyone? Anyone? Bueller? No one? Ok, here we go!”

Do you ever look at a list or a genealogy in the bible, and you get that glossy eyes feeling? You start to skim over the names, you can sometimes put them into context, you have a tough time pronouncing most of them, and you get done reading, and you quite honestly aren't really sure what you just read.

Well in our reading from yesterday and now today, Genesis 10, we have quite the list. To simplify it, we have the account or family tree of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. In verse 15, we read of one of the sons of Ham that is probably the most recognizable, Canaan.

Now you may look through these lists and wonder, “why are these important?” Well, these are all peoples, families, all parts of the full story of God. God's story isn't just linear, it isn't just a straight line, it is a full-blown, TRUE STORY. He is the God of **all of these people**. Whether they were to realize it or not, whether they worshipped Him or not, God is over them all.

Sometimes it can be hard to remember that, can't it? That God does indeed love **all people**, he cares for **all people**, he sent his son to **die for all people**. While it may be hard to remember that, you can look at each of the names in our reading for today and know that God loved them. Even if they hated Him, He is a God of love.

In verse 32, we read that these are the clans of Noah's sons, and from these nations spread out over the earth after the flood.

We may not know exactly who we descended from over the last several thousands of years, but what we can know is this, **God loves us, He cares for us, and you are part of HIS FAMILY, through Christ**. So, read over the reading again, stumble through the words, I'll admit, it happens to me too, and remember that on the last day, all of these different families will be brought together to be one united family, **The Body and Family of God**.

Prayer - Gracious God, thank you for sending Christ into this world and bringing us into your family through Him and through the waters of baptism. In His name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday, March 25, 2021

Read Genesis 11:1-9

Confusion and Promise

“Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.” (Genesis 11:9)

How can there be so many languages and people scattered all over the earth? One could possibly say, in sin, we did it to ourselves, or they did it, or God did it. Sounds a bit confusing and tempting: **“They said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth”** (11:4). Perhaps, trying to reach God or “the heavens” in ungodly efforts to **“make a name for themselves,”** showed dishonesty and distrust in the name of the LORD God Almighty, not depending on Him alone but in themselves.

After the Flood, the people were one and had one language: Perhaps the time had come for the Church to be scattered among the wicked **“over the face of all the earth”** according to God’s plan of salvation. God was preserving the offspring, the Messiah, through His people. Earlier; **“God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you”** (Gen. 9:8-9). As God also promised to Abraham and his sons (see Genesis 17:7).

Today, March 25th, the Church celebrates the *Annunciation of Our Lord*. Gabriel announces to Mary; **“you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus”** (Luke 1:31). Fittingly, and soon after, Mary’s song magnifying the LORD describes how the LORD **“scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts”** (Luke 1:51). And how God promised help to His children Israel, the Church; **“in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever”** (Luke 1:55) a Savior. Jesus the Christ, the promised offspring, was “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” Incarnate in human flesh for our eternal salvation, forgiveness, and redemption through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Yahweh sees the intentions of our hearts just as He knew the intentions of the people scattered at Babel to **“make a name”** for themselves. We may often attempt and fall into temptation to **“make a name”** for ourselves in our weakness and sin. Yet God has sent a Savior, Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh who became sin and weakness for us who atoned for our sins on the cross, for in Him, we are one.

Prayer – Thank You, Heavenly Father. For sending Your only Son, who atoned for all our sins on the cross. In this present world, we are tempted to make a name for ourselves. Help us to trust in You alone for life and salvation for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday, March 26, 2021
Read Genesis 11:10-32

Seeing the Landscape of God's Work

Perhaps after reading this section of Genesis 11, you are thinking the same thing I am while writing this: "what am I supposed to care about a genealogy?" No doubt this is the same thought many readers have when they're handed a slick, new pocket Bible and the church has decided that the best way to begin the New Testament is with a list of 42 names. It sort of kills the enthusiasm for the reader to continue. But if there is any vested interest at all, the reader does continue, for they know that the genealogy isn't the good part, it's just setup for what follows.

Consider where today's text falls: between the story of Babel and the Call of Abram. After God confused the language of the peoples as we read about yesterday, it looked like the world was only getting more chaotic and disordered. Still, His plan was unchanged. In the genealogy of Abram, we zoom in toward the one who would continue God's plan to bring the Savior to the world.

Perhaps we should think of the genealogy as a landscape shot in a movie where the whole setting is surveyed before the camera zooms in to where the action takes place. The descendants of Shem did not know that they were the torch-bearers of God's purpose, but their names stand as a record of the way that God's hand was upon history to raise up precisely that man whom He wanted to be the forefather of Christ.

Prayer: God of all ages, teach us to see Your work in all we witness. Reveal to us Your mighty working and cause us to praise Your name. We thank you that you brought forth our father Abraham and that through him You Yourself came to us. Make us to treasure Your works both great and small and rejoice in Your salvation. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, March 27, 2021
Read Genesis 12:1-9

“Generations and Promise”

I can say that I knew both my grandmas and one grandpa. I know my parents, myself, and my kids, and can imagine the fine grandchildren they will bless us with one day – five full generations! Abram, from today’s reading, might have known *ten* older generations – all the way back to Noah, plus 175 years full of his own descendants. Using the numbers from Genesis, Noah lived for 40 years after Abram was born! Those long lives make for some strange families.

People have calculated, using Biblical numbers (from all those genealogies), that the world has been around for about 6,000 years. If each generation is 20 years, that means there have only been about 300 generations in the entire history of mankind. That would mean that most of us have touched 1/60th of all human generations. We really haven’t been here that long!

But how long did it take mankind to forget the lesson of the Flood? Long before Abram, they’d already forgotten God and built the Tower of Babel. The ensuing confusion of language still didn’t bring them back to God. Noah and his sons, who’d personally witnessed God’s wrath and experienced God’s mercy were still living and presumably re-telling the story; but nevertheless, mankind still ran from God.

So what does God do? He takes a simple man – Abram – who lived his life, surrounded by idol-worshippers. God speaks to him and promises that he and his barren wife would become a great nation and their offspring would be a blessing to the entire world. But witness the power of the Word: Abram *doesn’t* laugh in God’s face. He doesn’t ask another god for a second opinion. Rather, he packs up everything (yes, he took the kitchen sink!) and began to travel exactly where God told him to go.

Left to his own, man fails. But thank God He keeps coming back to us! He promised Adam and Eve; He promised Noah; and now He promised Abram and Sarai. I’m certain they didn’t completely understand God’s promise, but they believed. God’s Promise continued throughout the generations until its Fulfillment was born in Bethlehem and went to the cross. And it continues to this day, and directly to you and me. And God continues to bless the world by His children living and telling of His love.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for continually coming back to me, blessing me with Grace and Promise. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, March 29, 2021
Read Genesis 12:10-20

Benefiting from the Plague

This is one of those little stories that could demand a lot of attention, but for today I just want to consider one detail: **“the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.”** The Hebrew word for plague is *naga*. It means to strike, punch or plague. Pharaoh may not have known what he was getting himself into when he took Sarai, and he definitely didn’t expect to get pummeled by God. Nevertheless, he got the message and let Abram and Sarai go.

The story clearly foreshadows a much more stubborn pharaoh who be struck, pummeled, plagued ten times before letting go of Moses and the many Israelite slaves. Yet the theft of Sarai and the enslavement of Israel are both shadows of the great imprisonment that afflicts humanity. As Paul says in Galatians 3:23, **“Before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed”** (Gal. 3:23). Our freedom came in a somewhat different way. Jesus came as the suffering servant to be crushed for our iniquities, enduring punishment in our place. Yet we **“esteemed him stricken (literally plagued), smitten by God, and afflicted”** (Is. 53:4). Yes, Christ was plagued for us in order to set us free from sin, death, and the devil.

Prayer: Dear Savior, we give you thanks for being willing to face the great plagues of God, so that we would not. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Adapted from Chad Bird’s **Unveiling Mercy**

Tuesday, March 30, 2021
Read Genesis 13:1-18

Learning to Share

O Lord, You have taught me about sharing! You have shared Yourself with me - my freedom comes from You and Your taking my place on the cross! You created me even knowing that my heart would be wicked and need Your suffering for me. You came to serve, sharing Yourself with me and others.

Please teach me to share. Lot took what looked best to himself when Abraham gave him a choice, but sharing is rather looking for the best for others. Lord teach me, guide me, remind me to look out for others, to let my preferences not override the needs of others.

But Lord, I too have responsibilities. As I lead and guide in my turn, show me the way. Let my leading be for the benefit of those I lead. Let my desires be to promote the best for all. Let me live in You and show that in my sharing.

Abraham called on You. Abraham let You guide his life. You have shown that You do live in and with us, enabling people to share as well. Let your Word fill our lives, letting those communications change and support us. Your stories of Abraham bring Your actions into our lives as well. Let us choose, like him, to put your ways into our ways.

You brought Your Word into my life. Your Bible teaches, but more than that, it brings your power to change those who read/hear it. Please let me share that power with others as You see fit. That too, I would share.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for sharing Your life with me. Be in and with my life so that others may receive your blessings through me. Teach me and empower me to share as well! Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, March 31, 2021
Read Genesis 14:1-16

Victory

Can you imagine how big an army of just one king would be? Now can you imagine if FOUR kings came together?? And now can you imagine the battle between them and FIVE other kings and their armies?? This would have been a large battle. Then the army that is fleeing, they try to flee, but they end up many of them falling into pits of tar, and then the rest flee into the hills. The conquering army takes the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and also Lot, Abram's nephew, who had been living in Sodom.

This tells us a few things here. That one, Sodom and Gomorrah had been defeated, but two, that Lot had been living in Sodom, dwelling amongst them, living in their ways, ways that were, not the best.

But then we see one who did escape come to Abram! He tells him what had happened. Abram hears of this, and he knows he must do something. Why? Because his nephew was taken. So, he brings an army of 318 men, and they go in pursuit. When I think of this, 318 doesn't seem like much. But with their tactics and their planning to go by night, they defeat them. Not only do they save Lot, but they bring back all the possessions and the women and the people.

This is a passage that may seem odd to us as we read through it. Especially thinking how close we are to Good Friday and Easter. But when I read this, I think of the love of a family member. Abram, willing to risk his men and his own life to go after Lot, who had been lost in Sodom.

While Abram was Lot's uncle, we have a Heavenly Father who held nothing back. **Not even his one and only Son!** That son, Jesus, came to this world to fight on our behalf, to win a victory over sin, death, and the devil. Jesus through that victory, through that death, through that resurrection, makes us his brother and sisters, children of the heavenly Father. **That is love, true love.** As we venture ever closer to Easter, remember that victory that Christ won on **Your behalf.**

Prayer—Dearest Jesus, just as Abram defeated those who had taken Lot captive, you defeated the one who had taken us captive, Satan. We ask that you remind us of that victory and give us your hope and peace this Holy Week. In Your name. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday, April 1, 2021
Read Genesis 14:17-24

King of Righteousness and Peace

*And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)
Genesis 14:18*

Abram meets with kings in the Valley of Shaveh after rescuing Lot with God's help. King of Salem, Melchizedek, blesses Abram. **"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand"** (vv. 19-20). Notably, Melchizedek brings bread and wine to the meeting in the Kings Valley! Maybe Abram and his men were hungry and thirsty, or perhaps Melchizedek brought bread and wine for a joyful feast of thanks to the LORD.

Melchizedek the priest-king of Salem; **"by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace"** (Hebrews 7:2). Brilliantly and beautifully, this points to Christ; **"another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, 'You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek'"** (Hebrews 7:15-17; 5:6; see also Psalm 110:4).

In the Gospel accounts of Jesus: we see His life, incarnation, birth, baptism, ministry, teachings, miracles, etc., and how He said over and over how He would suffer, die, and rise on the third day. "Maundy Thursday, the day of Commandment (*Dies Mandati*)," which directs us to Jesus' command to love. **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another"** (John 13:34).

As we reflect on this text reading and the commemoration of the institution of the Lord's Supper as "a day of festive joy," the words of Martin Luther help clear this understanding:

"This is what matters, for Christ did not offer up (*sacrifice*) the bread and the wine when He instituted the Holy Supper. He merely gave the bread and wine to His disciples, as the words of institution declare. Christ indeed has offered up His body and blood (*on the Cross*). But that we sinners cannot do, and His sacrifice is eternal, "for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). That Melchizedek brought forth bread and wine is true. But the important thing is that he blessed Abraham and that Abraham gave him tithes of all. That is what the Holy Spirit wishes to emphasize, for so he (*Melchizedek*) prefigures the priesthood of Christ, which is eternal and which alone can bless us with forgiveness of sins and redeem from damnation all who believe in Him. Therefore Christ rightly is called a King of righteousness and of peace" (*Luther's Commentary on Genesis*)

Prayer – Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, thank You for giving us life and forgiveness in Your name. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday, April 2, 2021
Read Genesis 15:1-21

The Promise to Abram

God appeared to Abram in a vision and declared to him that he would have a very great reward. Abram protested that God had given him no offspring. To us, it sounds like Abram is being a real downer. Instead of thanking God for the reward he has been promised, Abram complains about the things he doesn't have. But God cuts through to the heart of the matter and promises Abram precisely the reward he was seeking.

You see, Abram was already a great man with abundant possessions. He had just returned from a great victory in a war against kings and did not even take part in the spoils as a matter of his honor. Abram had no need for material reward and was pretty apathetic toward receiving more. What Abram longed for was a son, someone to leave his possessions and to carry on the family. Abram longed for something more meaningful than material possessions and God promised that he would have it and would have it more abundantly than Abram could imagine.

For our parts, we too have material possessions to varying degrees, perhaps not as much as Abram, but most of us are at least comfortable enough to have the time and resources to read this devotion, so we are blessed beyond what nearly anyone in the history of the world could imagine. Yet, often what is missing in our lives is not material reward, but meaning and purpose. When we die, we will return to dust and the fruit of our labor will quickly be scattered to the wind. In our despair, God promises us more. He promises meaning and a future, forgiveness, and eternal life in Christ.

Even if we are not blessed with the miraculous visions of Abram to confirm these promises, we have the Sacraments to show us that God will keep His promise. We believe that the Lord of all creation can give these things to us and, like Abram, it is counted to us as righteousness. In us, God's promise to Abram is fulfilled as He raises us up as children from stones. So also, He will raise up His righteous children from the stones on the last day when the dead are raised imperishable. Though we are sojourners for now in a land that is not ours, God has made a covenant that He will give to us the Promised Land.

Prayer: Eternal Lord, we thank You that You are a God that makes and keeps promises and that You have promised to us exceedingly great things. Guide our hearts and minds to see in Christ Jesus the keeping of all Your promises. Guard and defend us in our faith that we might forever trust in Your promises and be counted righteous, until that day when faith gives way to sight and promises made give way to promises kept. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, April 3, 2021
Read Genesis 16:1-16

Hindsight

Any prospective parents who've wanted to begin their family, but instead run into the roadblock of infertility, will understand what's going through the heads of Abram and Sarai in today's reading. Abram's about 85 and Sarai's 75, so the clock isn't just ticking for them – it's totally dead. I question my own sanity at adopting Isaiah when I was 45, so I, too, laugh at the thought of changing diapers in my 80's!

But Abram and Sarai had faith in God's Covenant. He'd promised to make their offspring "**as the dust of the earth**", and they wanted to help God keep His promise. In the culture around them, it was acceptable in such cases for the husband to take a servant as a second wife. So, wanting to be faithful to God's promise (or, was she just blinded by the dream of motherhood?), Sarai offered Abram her maidservant, Hagar. What could go wrong?

We have the advantage of hindsight (and maybe a little distance from the emotions they were experiencing). The results were perfectly predicible – Hagar became pregnant and made it known she now despised Sarai. Sarai became resentful and, with Abram's blessing, she "**dealt harshly**" with Hagar.

Let's go back to that covenant. Every clause begins with "**I will...**", and that's God speaking. Every word of every promise is something that God alone will do. "**I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth.**" "**I will make of you a great nation.**" "**To your offspring I will give this land.**" Turns out, God doesn't need our help in creating miracles!

But today is Holy Saturday, the day after Good Friday. Jesus, the King of the Jews, the Son of David, who made the lame walk, the blind see, and the deaf hear – is dead. Imagine what was going through the heads of Jesus' disciples and followers! They'd taken his body down off the cross, and it was lifeless – stone-cold. Now how could God keep His promise of sending a Messiah?!?

But we have the benefit of hindsight. Jesus' new covenant with us includes Him dying for our sins (by Himself, abandoned by His disciples). He alone is buried in the ground. And He alone will rise on the third day! God's Promise doesn't depend on us – it solely depends on Him.

Just as God fulfilled His promise to Sarai & Abram, just as He made Hagar a mother of nations, and just as He rose from the dead, He keeps His promises even *despite* our failures.

Prayer: Lord God, thank You for making my life and salvation totally dependent on You alone. Make me now Your faithful servant. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, April 5, 2021
Read Genesis 17:1-14

A New Name

What's in a name? This is Juliet's question as she considers how life might be different if her beloved Romeo had a different name. She concludes that he would still be the same person, but the rest of Shakespeare's play makes it clear that Romeo's family name has great consequences.

Names matter. They identify us. They tell us and others who we are attached to. In Scripture, names do even more. Names are often given to reflect God's promises, especially when God is the one changing someone's name.

Abram is given a new name in our text for today. Before his name meant, "exalted father." Yahweh gives him a new name – Abraham, which means "father of many nations." Every time someone says his name, Abraham will be reminded of God's promise of numerous descendants and that His family will be a blessing to the all the nations. Galatians 3:7 tells us "**those of faith, these are the sons of Abraham.**" Every child of God is a descendant of Abraham because we share in the same promises, each blessed through THE descendant of Abraham – our Risen Savior Jesus.

In baptism, we too, have been granted new names, belonging to a new family. We are children of God, belonging to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our identity is changed. Our family is identified. What's in this name? Our hope, our life, our salvation, our true identity – people who belong to the Triune God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to remember Your promises to forgive, restore, and empower me as Your child every time I hear the family name that I have been baptized into. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, April 6, 2021
Read Genesis 17:15-27

More Than Expected

How God has a sense of humor! He fulfills His promises in surprising ways. He makes us aware that we don't see how He will or even can fulfill those plentiful promises. He gave Abraham a son -2 when He was 100 and Sarah, his wife was 90. Can't happen Abraham said - but God gave them Isaac!

And me? God promised me salvation - and provided it with through a cross! In my sin, I thought "It can't be done." - but He did. Then I feared death, I saw no way to escape - But then Jesus rose from the dead! He conquered death and gives me the benefit. That which was impossible He did!

I thought "I will do a little for God because I can surely do that". I failed. And God said, "Don't try, you will fail, and in trying, you call my salvation insufficient. But I love you anyway." In the midst of my failure, He made me a success.

Abraham became the father of many peoples. God blessed Him as the ancestor of the Christ, of the one God sent to save us all. A great honor, but Abraham didn't earn it at all. This is a gift from God. Not only was he a father but his descendants are many and blessed. So, we too are blessed, not just in small amounts but in overwhelming abundance, in more than we can even understand. Thank you, my Lord.

Prayer: Thank you God for giving to Abraham more than He expected. Thank you for the assurance that You will do likewise with me. Above all, thank you for Your Salvation, for saving and living with me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, April 7, 2021
Read Genesis 18:1-21

A Better Plan

What an interesting situation that Abraham finds himself in. He looks up, and he sees a few men standing before him. Abraham being a good host decides to try and find some bread and water for them. They ask him where Sarah is. And she is in the tent.

It's not a very far distance to that place, and Sarah can hear them. The Lord says to Abraham, in a year I will return to you, and Sarah will have a son.

Now, remember at this point Abraham and Sarah are both quite old, past the age to have children.

Sarah hearing this, laughs. She knows that this can't happen!! And then the Lord asks Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" Sarah denies it like crazy! But the Lord knew.

Have you ever had a moment like this? A moment where you wonder what in the world is going on with your plan God? Have you ever had a moment like that?

Sometimes we can look at what God has planned for us, and what is going on in our lives, and we just aren't sure what is going on.

But, **God's plan is always better than our plans.** We may not understand it, we may not like it, but God has plans much better than ours, and some that we may not understand. Sarah had no idea. Sometimes we have no idea. But for Sarah, even at her old age, she is promised her son. While she doesn't expect this to come to fruition, God's plan for her does indeed.

While we may not be sure of God's plans for us, He is in control, and **HE is the one who has our entire lives in His hands.** So even when we don't understand, we can trust in God and that His plan is ultimately best for us. Like Abraham and Sarah, we may not be sure of it, but God's plan is always best.

Prayer—Gracious God, while we may not always understand, we ask that Your will be done in our lives. We ask that you guide us, lead us, and work through our lives to show us how best to do Your will in our lives. In the name of Jesus Your Son, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday, April 8, 2021
Read Genesis 18:22-33

Righteous and Unrighteous

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Genesis 18:25)

One wonders at these questions prayed by Abraham to the LORD in this reading. These questions may seem unavoidable and uncomfortable to the Hebrew patriarch and us. Amazingly, Abraham is standing before God Almighty and is turned toward the LORD in faith. Abraham is talking to Yahweh in the form of a man, who just stopped by for a meal at Mamre to announce a child of promise to him and his wife Sarah to bear a son, and is now on His way to Sodom to destroy the wicked.

Abraham is concerned for the righteous among the evil unrighteous to be destroyed; **“Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?”** (v. 23). Abraham pleads for the city to be spared on account of fifty righteous down to ten righteous. The LORD promises not to destroy Sodom down to ten righteous, **“For the sake of ten I will not destroy it?”** (v. 32).

Looking ahead of this text, we know that the LORD in mercy rescues Lot and his two daughters, and the unrepented wicked were not spared in Sodom and Gomorrah. And now we behold and look to Jesus Christ crucified for our sin, who took our punishment of death so that we can see and have God’s love and mercy He desires for all, for you and me. In our unrighteousness we are condemned. We would be destroyed if it were not for the sake of God’s mercy and grace credited to us by His righteousness given for the sake of Christ crucified and risen for us.

We are freely justified and forgiven on account of Christ alone, the descendant and offspring of the child of promise. “Take comfort in the truth that God spares the wicked for the sake of one righteous man—Jesus Christ . . .

Prayer – O Lord, spare us who live in this world of wickedness, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.”
(Lutheran Study Bible)

Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday, April 9, 2021
Read Genesis 19:1-22

Zoar

In this passage, we see firsthand the depravity for which God destroyed Sodom, and we see all the more the mercy that he grants to those that love Him. To set the scene, we have two angels who come into Sodom, presumably to find out if there are ten righteous people in it as God promised to Abraham that it would not be destroyed if even ten were found and to execute His judgment when none are found.

When Lot sees these visitors come into the city, he forcefully demands that they stay in his home rather than in the town square where they would be at the mercy of the townsfolk. When the people of Sodom find out that Lot is harboring these guests, they try to break down Lot's door to get to them. Lot does his best to keep the people out, even offering them his two daughters.

Ultimately though, it is the work of the angels that keeps the rabble out. It is then that the angels reveal to Lot who they are and for what they have come. The angels warn Lot to take his household and flee the city and so he does even if his sons-in-law would not listen to him. So Lot left his home to flee to a little city, so small that it was called Zoar, meaning "little."

We have a lot in common with Lot as Christians. We are surrounded by a depraved world that does not welcome God's message but wishes the worst upon it and its messengers. Yet for all our trying, we cannot do anything to keep the world out. Even if we offer what is dearest to us to the world, it will not stop unless we give up God's Word. But thanks be to God that we are not left to our own devices but He has sent His angels and prophets to warn us and even His Son to save us from the coming wrath. The present state of the world will be subject to the wrath of God as He cleanses His creation from sin. Yet He has mercifully provided that He will bring those who are His people out to a place of safety.

I'm not sure how common of a name it is, but there is a church in my hometown named Zoar after this story. In a way, every church is a "Zoar," a little place of refuge where God will lead us safely out of the sinful world to life with Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have sent messengers to warn us of Your wrath against sin. Lead us away from this sinful world to a place of refuge in Your Son. Forgive us when we walk in the ways of the world and teach us instead to walk in Your ways. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday April 10th

Read [Genesis 19:23-38](#)

God Remembered

At first glance, this reading looks way more like the “Law” than the Gospel. It starts with Lot dragging his feet all the way out of Sodom and Gomorrah, just in time for the LORD to destroy them due to their residents’ evil hearts. As they left, Lot’s wife violated their instructions and turned back, immediately becoming a pillar of salt. Next, Lot and his two daughters are too afraid to live in God’s sanctuary city of Zoar, despite His assurance for their safety there. Instead, living together in a cave, Lot’s daughters decide God’s command to be fruitful and multiply requires extraordinary measures from them: they get their father too drunk to know what happened and take turns becoming pregnant by him.

What can we learn from this? There are plenty of lessons from the Law – don’t choose to live in places so full of evil that God rains down sulfur and fire on them, don’t turn from God’s path, and so on. But surprisingly, even though they’re only three words, the Gospel shines through this darkness with an even stronger message: **“God remembered Abraham”**.

Not because Abraham was sinless or because his faith was so strong, but because of His promise to him, God delivered His faithful from being overcome by the wicked. He saved them from being hurt by them, and removed them from their presence to keep them from being further corrupted. Even Lot, who is **“you of little faith”** personified, was delivered, protected, and even allowed to father large nations of peoples.

How about you? Does God remember you? When fire and sulfur rain down around you through sickness, death of loved ones, unemployment, or persecution – does God remember you? When temptation draws you in, when weakness convinces you to make bad choices – does God remember you then?

God remembered Noah and the animals in the ark and gave them dry ground. God remembers His covenant with you when He sees a rainbow. God remembered Rachel and gave her a son. God remembered His people in Egypt and delivered them from slavery. And, God remembers you and loves you so much, **“that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

Prayer: God of infinite memory, remember me and Your covenant with me, especially when I forget You and feel weak and alone. In Your Son’s strong Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, April 12, 2021
Read Genesis 20:1-18

Here We Go Again

Really?? Abraham did this again??

Before Abraham told Pharaoh that Sarah was only his sister. Now, he has done it again. This time it was Abimelech, king of Gerar.

What is truly striking in this story is the repetitive, self-serving nature of sin AND the incredibly patient mercy of God. Apparently, it was just the nature of kings to take and women that they wanted as their own. Likewise, Abraham seems disturbingly comfortable with presenting Sarah as his sister in order to save his own hide. We know our own temptations toward self-serving consumption and thoughtless self-preservation. We often put our own wants and well-being over the interest of others.

Yet God is incredibly patient. Notice that He shows mercy to both Abimelech and Abraham. Abraham is protected from the fury of the king who has been deceived. Abimelech is protected from his own desires as he is told by God in a dream, **“It was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore, I did not let you touch her.”** This shows the depth of our need for God. Not only do we need forgiveness from our God who is willing to sacrifice Himself in our place, but who knows how often He has shielded us from indulging our destructive sinful impulses.

Such is our utter dependance upon Christ. Without His merciful sacrifice, our sin would separate us from God and life with Him forever. Without His gracious Spirit, we could not believe in Christ, and furthermore, apart from the Spirit’s leading we would continually seek out and grab hold of the very things that would cause our demise.

Prayer: For all of Your many mercies to us – seen and unseen – thanks be to God!

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, April 13, 2021
Read Genesis 21:1-21

But You Are There

I thank you, LORD. When disaster looms, when I fail in life, when all is lost - THEN I see You acting. When life is good, I am happy and fail to see beyond myself. In satisfaction, in self-confidence, I lose my interest in You. But when You allow me to lose, then I realize that on my own I have nothing.

You are wonderful, my LORD. You come to me when I least expect it. But You are there. You love me even when I thought nothing of You. Again, and again, I perceive Your working in my life; not in the way I had planned, but bringing me much more and better than I could have dreamed.

Why do I keep losing sight of Your care? Why do I care more about appearances than You? Why does my heart follow itself? Please take me! Please teach me to listen to You. Guide me into Your Word where I see Your actions in all parts of life.

I see You in Your care for others! You cared for Hagar - who knew You but didn't realize You were for her too. You cared for Ishmael, whose life was forfeit for unwise behavior. Please give me that care, Me who so continuously tries to tune You out of my life. Surely Your goodness and mercy will follow me, according to Your promises.

Prayer: It is hard, Father, to accept that what I see as "bad" for me will really bring good. So, please, comfort my heart, open my eyes and understanding. Let me rejoice in my need for You and see You in my life. Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, April 14, 2021
Read Genesis 21:22-34

Covenant

Treaties. Covenants. Agreements. We may see these or come into contact with these on a daily basis. And here we see in this section of Scripture a treaty between Abimelech and Abraham. This covenant confirms that they won't deal falsely with each other, and will stay in an agreement, an alliance of sorts.

They name that place Beersheba, since there that is where they swore the oath. Abraham made this covenant at Beersheba, and an alliance was made with the Philistines, and Abraham journeyed many days in their lands.

While we hear here about the covenant that was made between Abimelech and Abraham, there is a greater covenant that we have, that you and I have with God. God had the covenant with Israel, his people, covenants, to never send a flood again to destroy the world, a covenant to send a savior, and thankfully, God always holds to His covenants and promises.

While we may know people or situations where promises and covenants weren't held, we never have to worry about that with God. His promises, from whenever they may be, **will always hold true.**

While we may not have been part of the original covenant of God with His people, Israel, we don't have to worry about that. You and I have been grafted into that covenant, putting us in the covenant as if we were the original recipients of it. You and I are **fully in the covenant with God**, and we can know that we are indeed saved through that covenant of God sending Jesus to this world. That is the best contract any of us could be in.

Prayer—Gracious God, thank you for bringing us into the covenant that you have with your people, making us yours. Keep us always strong through Christ and remind us each and everyday that we are YOUR people. Thank you for making us your own. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday, April 15, 2021
Read Genesis 22:1-24

On the Mount of the LORD He Will Be *Seen*

We do not think of offering our children as a sacrifice. That is unthinkable and beyond imagination! Yet, God called and tested Abraham to offer up his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering sacrifice. Abraham heard the LORD'S voice and listened attentively to Him, taking his beloved Isaac to the mountains in the land of Moriah. Abraham believed God would *see* and *provide* Himself the lamb sacrifice; **"Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide [see] for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together"** (Genesis 22:7-8).

The Holy Spirit reveals in the New Testament: **"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back"** (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Martin Luther wrote, "A loving father by God's command must slay his only beloved son; and the son is obedient, and "as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" (Isa. 53:7). Isaac, no doubt said, "God's will be done." As his father, so also he had learned to obey the Lord. There is no greater example of obedience than this, outside the perfect obedience which Christ Himself rendered His Father when He suffered and died for our sins." (*Luther On Genesis*). **"Your will be done."**

Abraham did not immediately see how God would *see* and *provide* the lamb in the place of his son Isaac. Today, we do not visibly see the ascended Lord Jesus standing in front of us. Yet, we see by faith receiving His Word and True Body and Blood in the Sacrament. Jesus *sees* us today, and gives Himself to us continually, and will visibly return on the Last Day Resurrection, making all things new: **"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls"** (1 Peter 1:6-9).

Prayer - LORD. Help me to always look and trust in Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for me.
Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday, April 16, 2021
Read Genesis 23:1-20

The Burial of Sarah

The burial of Sarah is one of many little scenes in Genesis that I find simply baffling. Nestled between the end of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac and Isaac's search for a wife, we have a lengthy report not only about Sarah's death but Abraham's insistence on paying for the gravesite though the prior owner was insistent on giving it to him. The telling is much more focused on this bargaining than on Sarah's death itself. A certain Jewish tradition holds that Sarah died when her husband and son returned from Mount Moriah and told her what had happened. We have no idea whether this is true or not because the text is so strangely silent on the issue.

What is most important for Moses in composing Genesis, as we have it, is that all of the details of this transaction were recorded. For us today, we are much more concerned with the details of death and the mourning process and the gravesite and burial are a quick ceremony and we may perhaps visit the grave to place flowers on occasion. Before the time of modern embalming procedures, death was a much more visceral process. The human body is a fragile thing that God did not intend for decay, so when it does, it is not a pleasant situation. This is the situation Abraham was faced with, so he spared no expense in finding a burial site for his wife, paying an exorbitant sum so that there could be no dispute over whose ground it was.

To be frank with you, I don't know what implications this chapter of Genesis has for us today. But it does call to mind the account of Jesus' burial. Like Sarah, Jesus was buried quite quickly after death. Both were also committed to the care of a wealthy man who spared no expense in honoring the dead in their burial. But whereas Abraham buried Sarah "out of his sight" (probably to spare himself the constant reminder), a watch was set over Jesus' grave so that it could not be disturbed. In the case of Sarah, Abraham's main concern was to honor his wife but to distance himself from her death.

In the case of Jesus, the concern of Joseph who buried him was to honor him but the concern of the Jewish ruling class was to revel in Jesus's death and make certain that nothing could disturb that reality. What they did not expect was that the movement would not be of mourners going in to visit the dead but the dead rising to go out and visit those who mourn. This is not only what happened at Jesus' tomb, but what will happen at all of our graves when the Lord returns and raises the dead. Though we, like Abraham, hide death from ourselves, we do not do so without hope. For we know that God has raised Jesus from the dead and that He will also raise us and all believers in Christ Jesus. Perhaps on that last day, we can ask Abraham and Sarah more about what was happening in Genesis 23.

Prayer: Living God, we thank You for Your grace in sending Jesus to die and be buried for us. Teach us to hold fast to His promise so that as we follow Him into the grave, we might also follow Him out of the grave into renewed life. Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, April 17, 2021
Read Genesis 24:1-14

“Like Father, Like Sons & Daughters”

Our reading for today begins, **“Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years.”** For many of us who fit this description, we know this story is for us. By this point in his life, Abraham had left his homeland, made a new home in Canaan, and had become wealthy, powerful, and respected. He’d spoken to God and had been promised all these things and more. Now he is 140, has a descendent, and knows that through this son God would create a nation through whom the world would be blessed. And so, like most people at this point in life, he wants to make sure all these things are carried on to the next generation.

For us, this means saving for retirement, buying insurance, writing a will, and creating a life directive. We do these things to care for our family and to be sure our intentions for our descendants are crystal clear. For Abraham, this meant all those normal things plus – He had been given a promise by God that needed to be passed on. So, with painstakingly detailed instructions, he sent his most trusted servant back to Ur to find a bride from his people for his son, Isaac. He lived in Canaan and knew of the sinful corruption of the people around him and wanted to be sure that God’s promise wasn’t spoiled by failing to follow His guidance.

His servant goes on his way and, through prayer and impressive devotion to his master’s desires, admirably carries out Abraham’s wishes. The story won’t finish for a few more devotions, so stay tuned. But, what can we learn about God from the story so far?

God’s plan of salvation for His people is carried out through all sorts of people – simple nomads like Abraham; kings, prophets, slaves, shepherds; even prostitutes and “tax collectors” (probably even lawyers!). But moms and dads play a big part. And Abraham and Sarah were great parents: they lived their lives faithfully – moving to a strange land, worshipping a God that told them mysterious things – and they passed this on to their children.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” ([John 15:13](#)). How often do parents “lay down their life” for their children? Abraham and Sarah did frequently. Parents today, too, do this on a daily basis. Why? Because our Heavenly Father did that for us by sending us His Son, Jesus. And because our Father in Heaven continues His promise to Abraham – to be a blessing to the world – through you and me, His children.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, strengthen me through Your Spirit that I may pass on Your Salvation to my own children and to those in the world around me. In Your Son’s Name, Amen.

Love you, Mom & Dad!

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, April 19, 2021
Read Genesis 24:15-33

Begun in Prayer...Ended in Thanksgiving

The story of Isaac and Rebekah continues as Abraham's servant realizes that this woman who has helped him is the very one that he has been looking for. Upon realizing this he proclaims, "**Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master.**"

Perhaps most telling here is the brief note that is offered in the Lutheran Student Bible, "The servant began his search with prayer (in yesterday's reading) and ended it with thanksgiving, a practice worthy of imitation." Yes, it is.

Many days we can begin our work (whatever it may be) and thoughtlessly dive in without considering our Lord. How foolish we are! The Lord formed us and forgave us and filled us with faith. As Deuteronomy 30:20 states, "**The LORD is your life.**" Yet we forget and shamefully imagine that what we achieve is apart from His doing.

Forgive us, Lord!

Yet He has not forsaken his steadfast love and faithfulness toward us. He daily and richly forgives us and provides for us in a million ways seen and unseen. Such that every success great and small should be seen as an occasion for thanksgiving.

Whatever work this new week entails for you, begin in prayer and end in thanksgiving, it is a practice worthy of imitation.

Prayer: Almighty God, merciful Father, who created and completed all things, on this day when the work of our calling begins anew, we implore You to create its beginning, direct its continuance, and bless its end, that our doings may be preserved from sin, our life sanctified, and our work this day be well pleasing to You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, April 20, 2021
Read Genesis 24:34-49

Let Your Light Shine

Our Lord Jesus has asked us to share with others. And He tells us “let your light shine ... that others may see God in it”. But Lord, You were tempted, You know how I fail so often. It is so easy to ignore my opportunities, to do just the minimum. And yet ... I remember what You did for me - not just the minimum but everything, more than I can ever ask for.

Rebekah is such a good model for me. She offers a drink to a stranger when the drink is difficult for her to obtain and then she offers more to water his camels. That is not easy and involved much effort. Yet she offered all this with no expectation of any reward.

Be with me Lord. I think I would find it easier to carry a load and extra mile than to simply stop and talk for a while to some stranger. My desires seem so important and others so trivial. Oh, Jesus, teach me. And even more, be in me, be the power within me reaching out to others. Give me that will and ability to share my efforts for their benefit.

Even as I see my failures, I see You stepping with Your promises. You promised to save me, and You have. But more You have promised to abide with me, and You do. Please Lord, let others see Your actions in mine. Be my life according to Your promises.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for giving me the example of Rebekah. Thank you for showing me the nature of the life You live in me. But even more, thank you for the promise that Your light will shine in my life too. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, April 21, 2021
Read Genesis 24:50-67

The Best Love Story

Don't you just love a happy ending? We may actually be accustomed to them quite a bit in our world? The loveable guy ends up with the girl. The thing that no one expected but really wanted to happen, happens. And here, at the end of Genesis 24, we have one of those happy endings! Rebekah and Isaac become married. This beautiful moment.

They are a distance apart, but Isaac sees camels up in the distance! Rebekah looks and sees someone coming towards her. It is a servant. She asks who is coming to meet her, and it is his master, Isaac. It is a storybook moment, something we would only think we might see in a movie.

The thing is, that a story like this, a perfect end to a story of love, can sometimes give a false hope. Have you seen any romantic movie from Hollywood in the last several years? They all have story book endings, the fireworks, everything works out kind of love. But in reality, love like that can fail us. Love like that in real life doesn't always end in sunshine, rainbows, and fairytale endings.

But there is a love story, that rivals Rebekah and Isaac, and is even greater than that love.

And the ending? Every single firework in the world wouldn't be enough to celebrate this ending!

The story even has a better ending for us than any movie could have!

It is the love of Christ. The story of God sending His only Son to live on this earth, and die and rise again, **for you!** That love that passes all human understanding is what will bring the perfect ending about when we are with Christ and all the saints in the new heaven and new earth when Christ comes again. There will be bumps along the way, but be patient, because that end is for sure, and the love of Christ for you, his forgiven and redeemed child, will bring you to that glorious end!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you sent your son to die on the cross for us and rose him victoriously on that Easter morning. Remind us of that love and grant us your peace and comfort as we go through our lives, knowing that in the end, your love is sure, and will bring us to be with you in glory forever. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday, April 22, 2021
Read Genesis 25:1-18

Many Nations

Here we see Abraham's death at a good old age, a father to *many nations* as the LORD had promised. Abraham's descendants, and the promised offspring "**for an everlasting covenant**" (Genesis 17:7) is not only a physical genealogy we see from his wife Sarah mother of Isaac. Or from His concubines, his wife Hagar mother of Ismael, and his wife Keturah who bore Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. But of the physical and spiritual everlasting covenant promised: "**offspring, who is Christ**" (Galatians 3:16). In Him, all are gathered in His name sharing in God's promise by grace through the righteousness of faith.

The New Testament Scripture explains: "**That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of *many nations*'—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of *many nations*, as he had been told, 'So shall your offspring be.'** He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.' But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Romans 4:16-25).

Yahweh is the God of the living as Jesus explains the resurrection of the dead: "**have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living**" (Matthew 22:31-32). Everyone clothed in righteousness will be gathered from *every nation*, all tribes, and peoples and languages (see Revelation 7:9-17). All baptized "**in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**" (Matthew 28:19) are counted righteous by God; Forgiven and justified through faith in Jesus Christ. The crucified and Risen King!

Prayer - "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."
(Revelation 7:12)

Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday, April 23, 2021
Read Genesis 25:19-34

Jacob and Esau

The story of Jacob and Esau strikes true for any of us who have a sibling, and I suspect even more so for those of us who know a set of twins. It's a classic story of sibling rivalry. There are equal parts love and hate and underhanded dealing. It is also troubling for many of the same reasons because not only does Rebekah have a favorite son and actively works to help him win out against his brother, but God Himself has a favorite among the twins. Elsewhere He goes so far as to say "**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.**"

How could a mother choose between her children like this, even choosing the younger son who was not particularly remarkable but was willing to cheat his brother out of the birthright for a bowl of soup? How much more unbelievable is it that God would choose one whose very name means "cheater" to become the father of God's people Israel? It is clearly not for anything that Jacob did right and it is not even that Esau did something wrong.

Quite simply, there is no way for us to explain it. God makes a choice and His plan falls in line with it. We can't always expect God to do things in a way that makes sense to us or appeals to our sense of justice and fairness. And for that, we thank Him, for He chose His Son to suffer rather than us and gave us the birthright that should have belonged to Jesus. Though we are all "cheaters" in our sin, God has chosen us to be His people who will inherit everlasting life which should have belonged to His Son. He has turned us from being cheaters of one another to cheaters of death. So He calls us to proclaim to others that God has chosen them and desires them to be a co-heir of life. Though we are the least of His children, God has loved us with a love that surpasses our understanding.

Prayer: Father, we know that we are unworthy children and have deserved nothing but to be disowned, but we thank You that You have chosen us to be Your people for no reason other than Your overwhelming love. Lead us to be more like Your more worthy Son, our Lord, in giving up what we have for others and leading them to You. Keep us always in the true faith that we might inherit the birthright of eternal life stored up in heaven for us. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, April 24, 2021

Read [Genesis 26:1-16](#)

Mercy, Mercy, Mercy

If you're like me, when you think of the "Spiritual Fathers", those giants of the faith from the ancient past, you're in awe. Moses! Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! These were super men with the strongest faith that mere mortals should bow down to if we were so blessed to see them. They talked with God, face to face!

Yes, some of their stories are truly amazing, something we should strive to copy. But there are those other stories that we're ashamed to admit sound all too familiar. Remember how Abraham had failed to trust God, and told the king that Sarah wasn't his wife because he was afraid of being killed? And then, 20 years later, he did the same thing again?! Well, you'll never guess what Isaac did. Yes, after God re-established His oath to Abraham with him, after promising that Isaac's children would "**number as the stars of heaven**," after saying that He would give his offspring "**these lands**," and "**bless all the nations**" because of them – Isaac did the same thing as Father Abraham. Afraid for his life, he told the king that Rebekah was his sister.

And Abimelech, the king, reacted with more honor than Isaac. He was shocked that Isaac had lied to him and immediately ordered all the people to not "**touch this man or his wife**", under fear of death. And that's coming from a heathen, Philistine king!

It's a good thing our salvation isn't dependent on Isaac's righteousness, but rather on God's mercy. In mercy, God repeated His promise to Isaac. His mercy alone protected Isaac and Rebekah from their shameful behavior before their foreign neighbors. It was only God's mercy that caused Isaac's farming to be wildly successful, and by mercy his growing wealth caused the Philistines to envy and fear him.

But this mercy wasn't something new – it overflowed at Creation, shone brightly after Adam and Eve sinned, and steadily rolled on, all the way to Bethlehem, Golgotha, and the empty tomb. And God's mercy continued at your baptism, lives now in your sanctified life, and soothes and heals through times of weakness and doubt.

Prayer: Holy Father, be merciful to me; I am but a sinner. Cover me in Your Son's righteousness for His sake, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, April 26, 2021
Read Genesis 26:17-35

Re-digging the Wells

There are few things as frustrating in life as re-doing work that has already been completed. Before computers would auto-save, there was nothing more agonizing than nearly completing an assignment when the computer would restart and all of the writing would vanish. There is a reason why it is a common saying that you “don’t want to re-invent the wheel.” Starting over is a colossal waste of time and energy.

So, there is something incredibly frustrating in reading about Isaac moving from place to place re-digging the wells that had been dug by his father Abraham. The extra work wasn’t caused by a technical error, but by Abimelech (the Philistine) who was trying to run off Isaac. As we were told in Saturday’s reading, **“Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.”** This is a not too subtle way of saying, “Go away!”

Yet this re-digging of the wells is not an exercise in futility, but a recognition of God’s faithfulness. In the middle of Isaac and his servants bouncing from place to place re-digging the wells of Abraham, the Lord appeared to Isaac and told him, **“I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake.”** God had promised this land and numerous decedents to Abraham. By re-digging the wells, Isaac was simply acting like God meant what He said. Isaac’s actions may seem redundant, but they are actually an act of faith – trusting that God will do what He promised.

In this broken world, the kingdom of God seemingly takes two steps forward and three steps back. I recently came across a page of plans for 2020 that I had written down last February. Needless to say, they didn’t happen. But in view of eternity, we don’t get discouraged because wells have been filled in, and we may have to re-dig them. God’s promises may not come to pass on our timetable or in the smoothest possible way, but as people who know the resurrected Lord is with us and will bless us eternally and will multiply God’s people, we faithfully re-dig the wells – sharing the good news, providing for the work of the church, and using our gifts for the good of others and to His glory. We trust God will do what He promised. He simply calls us to live in that expectation.

Prayer: Lord, help me to faithfully follow you and live each day trusting in Your promises. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, April 27, 2021
Read Genesis 27:1-9

Help with My Family

Oh Lord, I need your help - and never more than in my family! It is not that we are "terrible" people. It is not that one of us is worse than the others. Oh no, we are all sinners. But here among ourselves, here in the most intimate relationships I have - Here I find the most temptations, the most opportunities for sin!

It is with my loved ones that I want to hide my nature, to lie and deceive. It is there that my preferences and my personal desires lead me to making myself the point, myself the better position. Here O Lord, I am sure to need your correction, even as I dread what that can do to others' opinion of me.

How easy it is to lead a child astray with attention to what they can do for me. To guide and direct their thoughts and desires to pleasing me without concerns for what is best for them. A child is so dependent so desirous of my attention, and basking in that I feed myself! But God looked at my needs, not His! I am but a child to Him and He died in my place! Forgive me Lord, and take away my selfishness.

But I am also a child, loving and seeking favor with my parents! And there I am tempted to lie, to deceive them to get them to love me, as I think. But that too is wrong. The attention, the "love" I get that way, is all ashes. It is based on a falsehood and dissipates. But God already gives me His love. He gives me the strength, and desire to simply love my parents myself, in spite of their imperfection and my own failures.

It is all enough.

Prayer: Lord, You are my Savior and my strength. Guide me, guard me, love me, and in all that, enable me to love others as You have and do, love me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, April 28, 2021
Read Genesis 27:30-46

True Love

Genesis chapter 27 sounds like a plot out of a soap opera. A weaker and craftier brother disguises himself to give his nearly blind father the impression that he is the stronger, hairier brother. The plot is the idea of their mother who favors, the weaker brother. This crafty brother deceives his father well enough for the dying father to give the birthright (and more significant inheritance and blessing) to the “wrong” brother. Esau returns to find that the blessing has been given to his younger brother. He is furious. He vows to kill his brother once his father has died. Their mother is protective of Jacob, and so warns him to run for his life. Yet she also worries that Jacob will marry a Hittite woman (as Esau did), and the Hittites worshiped false gods, and so Esau had been somewhat estranged from his family.

Complete and total disfunction. Every which way you look there is division, hatred, murderous thoughts, and more. All of it is based on deception. I couldn't help, but think of Jesus' words in the Gospels that, **“nothing is hidden that will not be revealed, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”** Certainly, all our deceptions are known to God, and all will be revealed on the last day. Often, though, our deceptions are brought to light much sooner, and the damage done can be immense. Consider that before Rebekah suggested the plan to Jacob to steal the blessing, her family is intact. By the end of Genesis 27, she is rightfully afraid that she may soon be completely alone. The echoes of our sin reach much further than we imagine leaving damage and devastation much broader than we might anticipate.

Rebekah likely thought she was loving her son Jacob, but in deceiving her husband and encouraging stealing from Esau, she was putting Jacob's life in danger. Such is the dangerous nature of twisted love. In his 1st letter, John gives us a better vision of love, **“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers...Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth”** (1 Jn 3:16, 18). True love is not marked by deception, empty promises, or good intentions. True love is grounded in deed and in truth. It is exemplified and poured out on us by Christ who always spoke the truth, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and the deeds of his love are seen in His laying down his life for us. To truly love our family members, love our friends, and (as Jesus calls us to do) love even our enemies, we never take from others, but give of ourselves as Christ has given all for us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, lead me in self-giving love, as You empower me by Your perfect love for me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Thursday, April 29, 2021
Read Genesis 28:1-9

Blessing and Promise

“May he [God Almighty] give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!”
(Genesis 28:4)

Here in this text, Jacob is blessed by Isaac and received the blessing given by *El Shaddai* (God Almighty): This blessing was given to Abraham, to Isaac, to their offspring in their sojournings (dwelling places), and all the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7). Isaac was specific that Jacob was not to take a Canaanite wife. He was to find a wife from the house of Bethuel—“man of God,” Abraham’s nephew, and his mother Rebekah’s father. We see that Esau overheard the blessing Isaac blessed Jacob with and to not take a Canaanite wife. So Esau, perhaps unwittingly, marries Ismael’s (the son of Abraham) daughter.

Interestingly, amidst blessing and promise going on in the house of Isaac, this is the second time in Scripture we see Yahweh named *El Shaddai*—God Almighty. *El Shaddai* was first used in Scripture when Yahweh appeared again to Abraham (Gen. 17:1-9) to arise and confirm his covenant promise with Abraham, his descendants, and Offspring. As we have seen earlier, Abraham listened attentively to Yahweh, not withholding his only son Isaac. The LORD blessed Abraham and said, **“and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”** (Genesis 22:18). The promise and blessed Offspring of God is preserved through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s descendants. The offspring still refers to Christ, **“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ”** (Galatians 3:16).

Martin Luther commented on the faith of the patriarchs; “Because of their faith, they know also that the eternal blessings of life and salvation were embraced in their temporal benedictions. (*Luther’s Commentary on Genesis*). Because of the Christ Jesus who suffered, died, and rose from the dead for us and our salvation, eternal blessings, redemption, justification, and the forgiveness of sins are ours forever through faith in God Almighty’s eternal covenant promised Offspring.

Prayer – God Almighty. We thank you that You have given us everything through Jesus Christ, temporal and eternal. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday, April 30, 2021
Read Genesis 28:10-22

Surely the Lord is in This Place

This is the story of the greatest camping trip of all time Jacob is on his way to find himself a wife and he camps in the wilderness in the middle of nowhere halfway between home and who knows what. And that very night, he has this dream that sounds like something pulled out of Revelation: some sort of ladder to heaven with angels flying all around it with God Himself above it speaking to him and promising Jacob an overwhelming number of offspring (good news if you're on the hunt for a wife) and that God would be with Jacob to protect and preserve him.

When Jacob woke up, he was afraid. He wasn't expecting anything like this. He said "**Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it...This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.**" Now Jacob's knowledge of who God is may be a lot different than ours. He may have had a more localized idea of God than we who have centuries of theologians all telling us that God is present everywhere. But sometimes we can be like Jacob and be caught off guard by the presence of God in someplace. Now probably we don't have a vision of angels and God Himself speaking to us, but we do have the whole of creation testifying the goodness and providence of our Creator so that anywhere we go we can say "**how awesome is this place!**" and believe the promise that God promised to Jacob is the same that Jesus promised to us: "**Behold, I am with you.**"

When God's gracious promise and presence surprises us, we should honor him. For Jacob, that meant turning his pillow into an altar and promising to tithe all of God's blessings to him. For us, it might look very different but like Jacob, we too have Bethel which means "God's house," the dwelling place of God with man, Christ Jesus who is called Immanuel, God with us.

Prayer: Lord, be close to us. Give us eyes to see Your presence everywhere we are and to trust in Your promise that You will be with us always and provide all that we need. Come quickly Lord so that Your presence among us might be even

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday May 1st

Read [Genesis 29:1-14](#)

Living Faithfully

Wouldn't it be nice sometimes, in some circumstances, if God would just tell you what to do? You know, for the big decisions in life – “who should I marry?”, “which house should I buy?”, “should I become a fireman or a farmer?” I wrestled with that dilemma long and hard when I wondered if God would have me become a pastor. I studied the Bible, I read Martin Luther's “On Vocation” from cover to cover, I talked about it with many people, and I prayed over it. But I never received that clear, unquestionable message “written in the clouds” telling me what to do. No dreams, no visions, no handwriting on the wall.

Jacob had been told by his father in no uncertain terms that he was to go to Haran, where his family still lived, and there he would find his wife. Of course, this was the same Isaac who was so easily fooled into blessing him rather than his older brother! Esau was known to be big and burly and *very* red, and little Jacob had conned his father to his face! So, maybe those clear directions on where to find his future bride might not be such a certainty. And plus, he had no name, no address, no specific person to search for. “God, what am I to do?!” he might have cried out.

But in this case, Jacob “the deceiver” lived faithfully. He went to Haran, where he found his uncle Laban and his family, but not before “happening” across Rachel, his future wife, at a well. Seemingly by accident, he “just happened” to come across her, and finding out she was Laban's daughter, “**Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud.**” He'd just traveled 602 miles across wilderness, desert, and sand (so says the Internet), and here is beautiful Rachel! Those were real tears of joy at witnessing God's incredible goodness.

How about you? Living faithfully doesn't always have such dramatic results, but that's God's favorite way of working His will. Just like He didn't want Jacob to take a wife from the pagan Canaanites, He doesn't want us to conduct similar searches through pornography. You may not know what employment decisions to make, or what movie to go see tonight, but you know how to be faithful in your choices. God's Word is filled with stories of His People doing His will, with miraculous results. Especially Jesus.

Prayer: Loving Father, You reveal Your will to me through Your Word. Because of Jesus' focus on doing Your will, You have saved me that I may now worship You and serve my neighbor. Praise be to You! Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 3, 2021
Read Genesis 29:15-35

An Echo of Christ's Persistence

Jacob is not exactly the kind of guy that we look up to. His name means deceiver, and he is constantly living down to his name. Yet in this strange and sordid tale of trying to win the hand of Rachel in marriage, he does give us a glimpse of his descendant who is without deceit.

Laban doesn't want to let Jacob marry Rachel because she has an older sister, Leah. Jacob may desire Rachel, but in Laban's day, it was not an option for his eldest daughter to be unmarried while her younger sister walks down the aisle (so to speak). And so, Laban makes Jacob work seven years before Jacob can marry Laban's daughter. Unfortunately, for Jacob, the deceiver gets deceived and unknowingly marries the wrong daughter. Yet Jacob is so committed to marrying Rachel that he signs on to work 7 more years in order to marry the woman he loves.

Jacob is far from a paragon of virtue, but when it comes to his beloved, he is faithful. Faithful can mean many things, but here it carries the idea of persistence. He will do whatever it takes to win his beloved – including 14 years of unpaid labor!

Jacob's descendant, Jesus, certainly is the ultimate example of virtue in every aspect of life, but in particular, we see the echo of Jacob's persistent faithfulness in our Savior's commitment to us. He will do whatever it takes to win His beloved – including entering our humanity, enduring our pain, suffering for our sin, and dying our death. This pattern is not appearing for the first (or last) time in Genesis. A deeply flawed individual gives us a glimpse of Christ, who surpasses all who come before.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I give you thanks for your persistently love, that has sought out even me. Help me to see glimpses of Your mercy through Your ancestors, like Jacob. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, May 4, 2021
Read Genesis 30:1-24

Let Me Trust in Your Timing

Ooh, Lord, how I think I know better than You. I am Your child, and I know You care for me and withhold no good thing from me. And yet! I long for what I want. And I am impatient. Why do you make me wait, Lord? Why can't I have my desires, now!

I cannot judge what is good for me. What I think is bound by my desires, my environment, and my knowledge. Why do I keep trying to force the issue? Oh, Lord Teach me! Please prevent my wanting so bad, I fail to wait, but try to do Your will, though often my way, not Yours. Temptation looks to appropriate - "Lead me not into temptation."

But also, Lord, if I fail, as we so often do, please forgive me and bring me back to you. Make me realize and understand where I fail you, where sin has brought me to do wrong. Bring repentance into my life.

With repentance, cure the consequences of my wrongs. Keep your promises and bring good out of my failures. I know that You can and will! Let not my sin ruin life for others, let not me be cast away, let repentance change my heart again. Restore my reliance upon You, that those things too, those results of my errors be turned by You into blessings. All this I know You have promised. Let me live in Your promises.

Prayer: Please Lord. Let not my desires overwhelm me. Let me trust in You, even in Your "delays" that seem to mock my desires. Build my trust in You. Please let me see You working even in the consequences of my failures. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 5, 2021
Read Genesis 30:25-43

Blessed Beyond Measure

Sometimes when we read through this section of scripture, it can be a bit confusing. It doesn't always make sense. Jacob is asking that he may go to the promised land, back to his country. Laban has to pay him in some way and asks that he name his wages. Jacob says that he will take the sheep that are specked and spotted.

But before he can, Laban goes through and takes all of the striped and spotted sheep and goats out. This may seem odd on a first read-through. Laban agrees to this because it is an easy way to distinguish the flocks. Laban then puts a three-day journey between them so that the flocks may not intermingle, to hopefully give Jacob less chance to gain more sheep.

So, then Jacob does something that seems very odd to us, taking rods of green poplar and of the almond and chestnut trees, and places them in the watering troughs. This leads to the flocks actually conceiving more that have streaks and spots. The ones like that continue to grow and actually become stronger, making Jacob's flock stronger than that of Laban's flocks.

Jacob trusted that God who had already blessed him would continue to bless him. Meanwhile, Laban tries to do his own thing to prosper his own flock.

While this may be an odd story that we don't always understand, we can see Jacob's trust in God, even when it may seem odd, conquers all. God blessed Jacob and his flocks.

This doesn't all of a sudden mean that if we trust in God, we will be blessed beyond measure with flocks or riches or whatever it may be. What we know is that God will bless us as He sees fit in our lives, and we have the ultimate blessing, eternal life with God forever. Wealth on this earth may be nice, but the wealth that we are granted through Jesus is greater than any wealth here on earth.

Prayer—Gracious and Almighty God, just as you blessed Jacob and his flocks, you bless your people. Remind us that you work for our good, and even when we may not see it, you are there with us. Grant us peace and courage in this life and grant us that ultimate blessing of eternal life when that last day comes. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday, May 6, 2021
Read Genesis 31:1-21

God with Us

“Then the LORD said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.’” Genesis 31:3

Have we been dealt with fairly and unfairly at times? At work or home, amongst friends, and other situations in the civil realm of this world. Perhaps we are like Jacob, working hard for what we have and desire, no matter the cost, time, and labor. Maybe we are like Laban and his sons at times, unfavorably envying the wealth and possessions of others, even when we have all we need.

The LORD had certainly blessed Jacob with possessions and sons and daughters. Jacob’s service to Laban brought them both wealth. The sons of Laban envied Jacob and accused him of taking their father’s wealth. Of course, we know Jacob worked hard for Laban for 14 years for his wives Leah and Rachel. Jacob served Laban **“with all [his] strength”** (v 6). We may think, why would Laban and his sons look upon Jacob unfavorably? Maybe it was the feeble flocks Laban had and Jacobs’ stronger flocks that increased greatly (see vv. 7-12; Genesis 30:37-43).

The sins of jealousy, envy, pride, and many others; plague all mankind in various earthly situations. Yet, amid sinful chaos, God is with and looking after His chosen. Telling Jacob to return to the land of Canaan of his father Isaac, Yahweh reminded and promised Jacob He would be with him, **“I will be with you”** (v 3). Jacob fled with his family toward the land of Canaan with all that he had. **“And tricking [*gânab*—to steal - deceive] Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee”** (v 20).

What a situation thus far! Among the trickeries, deception, and all that is going on in our lives; God’s promises are always immeasurably greater. Jesus promises, **“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age [*aiōn*—continued duration; a space of time, forevermore]”** (Matthew 28:20) This means now and forever and beyond till the Last Day and into the new heavens and new earth to come. In Christ alone, we are God’s chosen people. We are justified on account of His righteousness given through faith alone in JESUS’ blood shed for our sin; in His perfect life, death, and resurrection given for our redemption.

Prayer – Thank You, LORD God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For being with us always through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday, May 7, 2021
Read Genesis 31:22-42

The Flight of Jacob

After 20 long years of labor for Laban, Jacob had been cheated over and over again. Laban first gave Jacob the wrong daughter for a wife, then he tried to cheat him out of his wages of sheep. But God wouldn't have any of it. The Lord had chosen Jacob to prosper and no hard bargain was going to get in the way of that. Jacob knew that he was becoming too wealthy to stay with Laban. The time had come for God to send him back home with all the wealth he had gained. When Laban was told what Jacob had done, he followed him and when he caught up, he accused Jacob of being a cheater. The irony of the story is that, unbeknownst to him, he had stolen Laban's household goods but because of Rachel's cunning, it was not found out.

So, once Laban had searched through all of Jacob's belongings for them and come up empty-handed, Jacob was upset. He rebuked Laban for his lying and cheating all of the years and for his greediness in following Jacob to claim what he had taken. Our passage ends with a statement that serves as a refrain in the whole story of Scripture: **"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."**

This is true for all of us. No matter how hard we work and try, the devil tries to send us away empty-handed. But God is on our side and He prospers us even when we've gotten ourselves into a bad deal. Still, the devil hunts us down, frustrated by the incredible grace that God has shown to us, and accuses us of sinning. Though he is right and we are surely great sinners even when we don't know it, he finds nothing. He can search through everything we are and he will find nothing to convict us of because Christ has taken all of our sin and evil upon Himself and hidden it with His own body. So we can face the devil, the world, and all our accusers boldly knowing that God is on our side and has given us all the good things we have for the sake of His Son and will never let them be taken away from us.

Prayer: Christ, we thank You that You have carried all our sins in Your own body and hidden away all of our faults. Teach us always to trust in You for deliverance from our enemies and for justice in the face of a world that deprives us of what we earn but can never deprive us of what You have earned.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, May 8, 2021
Read Genesis 31:43-55

Pile of Rocks

A pile of rocks, out in the desert in what is now Syria. That's all that's left of the 20-year relationship between Jacob, son of Isaac, and Laban, his uncle and the father of Jacob's wives. For twenty years Jacob had worked for Laban, seven as payment for the older sister of his "true love", Rachel, and another seven for the hand of his beloved. He then worked another six hard years for his uncle, receiving sheep, goats, cattle, and camels as payment. Laban had treated him deceitfully several times, and now Jacob had packed up his entire household – wives, children, and possessions – and was following God to the Promised Land.

Jacob and his household were exposed – traveling in the open, they could have been attacked and robbed – or worse. But God had commanded Laban in a dream to hold his tongue against Jacob. The pile of rocks now stood as a monument to their agreement. It witnessed their covenant before the God of Jacob and Laban's gods that they would stay on their side of the dividing line and that Jacob would treat his wives and children well.

I've been through that part of Syria, and today you wouldn't know those rocks from any other rocks. By now they may have been reduced to mere sand and scattered to the winds. But God's Promise to Jacob brought him back to the land that had been promised to his fathers. God's Promise for innumerable children to Isaac and Abraham was already being fulfilled. His Promise to Noah, His Promises all the way back to Adam and Eve – even in Jacob's day were being fulfilled.

That pile of rocks isn't much of a sign today. As a matter of fact, even the cross which bore Jacob's descendent Jesus 2000 years ago, is nowhere to be seen today. Yes, we rightfully make countless representations of that cross as a witness of God's fulfillment of His Promise, but today we have an even greater sign. No, we can't see it with our eyes, for this sign is an "emptiness". As the angel proclaimed, "**Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.**"

Prayer: Lord of Life, in ways more glorious than we could even imagine, You continually fulfill Your Promises. Thank you for redeeming us on the Cross and providing the empty tomb as a sign of our eternal home. In Your Risen Son's Name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 10, 2021
Read Genesis 32:1-21

The Foundation of Prayer

Jacob is terrified. His past deception of his brother Esau has finally caught up to him, and he is scared. Jacob has a lot to lose. As he states in his prayer, **“with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.”** He left alone, but he returns with two wives, children, flocks, and servants.

Jacob also recognizes that he doesn't deserve any of it. **“I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness you (LORD) have shown to your servant.”** Jacob knows that he is no match for Esau, but the LORD can do what Jacob cannot.

So, he prays, **“Please deliver me...for you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted for multitude.’”** Jacob is confident that the LORD will help, and the foundation of his confidence is in the promises of God. On this foundation, Jacob prays.

Two thoughts strike me about this scene. First, keep in mind that the LORD's first answer to Jacob's prayer is the scene we will read about tomorrow – Jacob wrestling with God. In a very real way, this is what prayer is. Struggling with God and trusting His promises in the midst of a broken world that doesn't always make it easy to see how God is at work. Yet such difficulty never negates the promises of God.

This leads to the second thought – the promises of God should be the foundation of our prayers. We may ask for anything, but our prayers should continually come back to the promises of God. Our requests, thanksgivings, and praise should rest not on the shaky ground of our desires, but on the rock of Christ and His promises for us. On this foundation, we find the proper ground to base our conversations with the only we One we need fear.

Prayer: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, May 11, 2021
Read Genesis 32:22-32

Struggling to Trust

It is quite common for people to struggle with God, well not really with God, but with God's plans for their lives. After all, we know so little, and fear so much. What we don't know we want to control - but that would be to leave God and strike out on our own! So, we know that that won't work; besides we have been living with God; we have been trusting Him for our salvation. But we don't know!

Jacob is facing his brother after cheating him, repeatedly. Jacob had fled for his life, fearing Esau. Now he was returning to the same country. Would his life, his family be safe? He had learned to trust God when he saw the ladder to heaven with God's angels traveling all over the earth on God's errands - so he knows to trust God. But so much depended on this trust.

So, it is for us as well. When things really matter to us, then we find out how we trust God; then our trust is put to the test. It is not that we don't believe in God for our salvation. It is the need to let go, to let our control disappear, to trust another with what is most important to us.

How hard it is - but how great the benefit. How God lets these times come for our benefit. Here we can practice the trust that we have in God - and He never fails us! In God we trust!

Prayer: Thank you, God! Thank you for letting me struggle with my fears and trust. Thank you because that way I am strengthened. Please use my trust now and in the future in Your will, not mine. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 12, 2021
Read Genesis 33:1-20

God Beside Us

Can you imagine the fear that Jacob must have had of Esau? He hadn't seen him for how long, and now the moment is coming. He looks up, and he sees Esau, and with him? 400 men. Jacob splits up his children between Rachel and Leah, and their servants. Jacob goes out in front hoping that Esau may have mercy, but then the moment of truth comes...he bows...

And Esau runs up to him and gives him a bearhug, gives him a big kiss and they weep together. This fear that Jacob had that his brother might enslave him or kill him, but Esau shows him grace and favor. He even wants to know the children near him and is excited to see and meet them.

And Jacob is looking to find favor in the eyes of Esau, and he tells him that he has. This moment that could have been absolutely horrifying and terrible for Jacob, is now a beautiful moment of grace and peace and brothers coming together after some time. Jacob and Esau then part ways go each to their own home.

While Jacob was worried, but yet **God was with him**. Maybe you have had moments like this where you weren't sure what was going to happen. Where you worry, where you aren't sure, and you have this pit in your stomach. While we may be sinful human beings, we know that God is always with us. Whatever we have to face in this life, **God is there beside us**. Even when we may be more terrified than we have ever been, **God is there beside us**. Remember when you face trials, strife, tribulation, or trials, **God is with YOU**.

Prayer—Gracious God, you are always with us. While we may forget that, You are always there whether we feel it or not. We ask that you would remind us of that, and give us your hope, peace, and comfort while we face whatever it may be. Remind us of your almighty and eternal presence. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen