

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 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 blessings 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"**. But 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 predicable – 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

Wednesday, May 12, 2021
Read Genesis 34:1-17

Trouble and Affliction

“Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land” (Genesis 34:1)

Israel, or Jacob, does not go to Seir as he said he would, where Esau returned and believed his brother would meet him. Instead, Jacob went and came peacefully to the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan and bought a piece of land. This is unusual for Jacob to say one thing and do another, right? Jacob’s daughter Dinah of Leah went to see and visit the daughters of the land. The name Dinah means something like “judgment by strife.”

This unpleasant story so far is hard to hear. Dinah is taken forcefully by Shechem, the son of Hamor, to lay with her. After Shechem had defiled Dinah, he demanded his father, **“Get me this girl for my wife”** (v. 4). Hamor and Shechem beg Jacob and his sons for Dinah to be given Shechem in marriage. Jacob and his sons knew of the affliction brought upon Dinah by Shechem. Jacob’s sons **“were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done”** (v. 7). Jacob’s sons answered Shechem and Hamor deceitfully because of their sister Dinah. The agreement was to have all males in the city circumcised (which they did), then Israel would agree to the giving of daughters from among each other and dwell as one people. The turnout is of this agreement was disastrous!

What do we make of this? Is this deceitful plan for the rape of Dinah just? Not at all. Martin Luther provides a helpful comment: “The text seems to indicate that fornication was forbidden not only in the family of Jacob, but also in the whole land . . . But neither Hamor nor Shechem confessed that a crime had been committed against Dinah and her family . . . Thus also the sons of Jacob sinned grievously, for they repaid one sin with another and one reproach with another so that both parties became guilty, whereas the Lord says, ‘Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people,’ as we read in Hebrews 10:30” (*Luther’s Commentary on Genesis*).

In all trouble and affliction, God’s everlasting love is with us for the sake of Christ. The One who suffered for us; died for us and rose for our justification, forgiveness of sins, and redemption from the power of sin, death, and Satan. **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 8:35, 38-39).

Prayer – Thank You, Father in heaven, for Your everlasting love, mercy, and grace given only through Christ Jesus crucified and risen for us. Amen.

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

Friday, May 14, 2021
Genesis 34:18–31

The Killing of Shechem

Like so many other stories we've seen in Genesis, God's people don't always act quite like we think they should. Or anything like we think they should. Simeon and Levi decided the best way to defend their sister's honor was to lie to a whole village, deceive them into circumcising themselves, and while they are recovering from this uncomfortable procedure slaughter them all. It is true that Shechem had done an outrageous thing to their sister, but Shechem's father and their father had made an agreement to make the best of an awful situation. Even though they were witnesses to the agreement, Simeon and Levi were violent men and chose of their own accord to exact vengeance by killing the whole town for the transgression of one man.

What lesson can we learn from such a horrible slaughter? On the one hand, we have a clear example of how we are not content to let our father deal with sin and often take matters into our own hands. Another lesson we could glean is that sin begets sin and evil begets evil. Because Shechem acted in such a way toward Dinah, many men were killed and their wives and children were taken as plunder. Both of these things are true, but even more instructive is how the hand of the Lord works even in this situation to accomplish His will. Because Reuben had slept with his father's concubine, he was denied the rights of the firstborn which then fell to Simeon. Because Simeon broke his father's agreement and did this awful thing, it fell to Levi and finally to Judah. Although he was fourth in line to rule his father's house, God worked through the egregious acts of his brothers to ensure that the one whom He desired would rule. And through God's providence, that authority came to rest on Jesus, the true King Who has power over all the earth and over sin and death.

What may seem to us like an unacceptable display of violence (and we are not mistaken in condemning this action) turns out to be a piece in God's plan to bring salvation to us and to all people.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach us to honor our agreements and to trust that You will effect revenge when where You will without our help. Send us Your Holy Spirit to give us patience in the midst of sin to know that You can use even our sin to accomplish Your work. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday May 15, 2021

Read [Genesis 35:1-15](#)

“Saints and Sinners”

Israel is in the news again. Rockets by the thousand are being launched at them from (modern day) Canaan. Explosions erupt from homes, from schools, from cities filled with civilians. People there are being injured and killed in the latest round in the seemingly never-ending war. Is that the Promised Land? The land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

In today’s reading, we hear a recounting of the many times in Jacob’s life where God has come to him with promises. But first, God blesses them anew by protecting Jacob and his murderous sons as they travel through Canaan, filled with people ready to avenge the deaths of their kinsmen in Shechem. But God filled the natives with terror, allowing Jacob to pass through unharmed.

It retells of Jacob’s first blessing from God at Bethel, along with the all-night wrestling match between God and Jacob, ending in yet another blessing. What about Jacob was so special that he deserved blessing after blessing, promise after promise? After all, he was “Jacob”, the “deceiver”! Isn’t that what the word “Satan” means? No, Jacob, his fathers, his sons, and all his countless descendants deserve only death. We deserve to die for our sins against God and our neighbors.

What was so special about Jacob is exactly what’s so special about you and me: God loves us. And He fills us with His Spirit so that we wrestle spiritually with God like Jacob did physically that night. That name, “Israel” that God Almighty called Jacob the morning after their encounter means, “Struggles with God”. So much of the world around us believes in other gods, believes in no god, or has given up and just doesn’t care. Believers – sinners – like Jacob and his sons struggle with God. We wrestle with His mysterious ways, with His “unjust” patience with gross sinners, with why He allows His faithful to experience pain, disease, and death.

Just like Jacob remained both “Deceiver” and now “Israel”; you and I, through Jesus’ blood alone, are both sinners and saints. And we struggle with God through worship, prayer, and praise every day on our way to the true Promised Land.

Prayer: Lord God Almighty, give us faith like Jacob to wrestle with You every day. Make us Your new Israel, in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 17, 2021
Read Genesis 35:16-29

A Statement

There is so much brokenness, sorrow, and sin that runs through today's reading. Rachel dies in childbirth. Jacob's son Reuben sleeps with his father's concubine. There is so much wrong in *that* sentence. Then Isaac's 180 years on earth come to a close as well. What kind of statement does one make in the face of so much pain?

Rachel seems to know that she will not survive the birth of her son. It is apparent to her midwife as well. The final statement that Rachel makes seems to summarize the pain and difficulty that has marked so much of her life. She calls her son Ben-oni. While this name could be translated multiple ways, it seems most fitting that she calls him "son of sorrow."

Yet Jacob (who has now been renamed Israel) wants to make a different statement even as he loses his beloved wife. Instead, Israel names his son Benjamin or "son of my right hand." Then, as now, most people seem to have been right-handed. The dominant hand is a picture of strength and the source of blessing. Instead of his son being a living statement of the sorrow of his mother's death, Israel wants his son to be a living statement of strength and blessing.

That's quite a statement to make in the face of grief. Our statement in the face of sorrow is in the One who belongs at the right hand of God the Father. Our Lord Jesus Christ takes our brokenness, sorrow, and sin upon Himself at the cross and gives to us a beautiful statement in His name – He is Jesus, "The LORD saves." He gives us a statement of hope and forgiveness and peace even in the midst of every ugliness of this world because He has conquered it all.

Prayer: Jesus, our Savior, give us comfort in sorrow and lead us in difficulty to point to You as our statement of hope. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, May 18, 2021
Read Genesis 36:1-19

Blessings and Curses

By this point in reading through the book of Genesis, you become accustomed to reading through genealogies. Sure, the names remain odd, but you begin to sift through the many names to reveal some gems hidden in the midst of these names that often don't mean much to us.

In the first half of this description of Esau's family, I couldn't help but recognize the blessings and curses that flow from Esau's choices. Rebekah had been devastated that Esau had chosen to marry a Canaanite, and, in time, multiple Canaanite women. The issue is one of faithfulness. The Canaanite gods were constantly attractive to God's people as an alternative. The temptation to follow these false gods became all the powerful when descendants of Abraham would marry among the Canaanites.

On the other hand, in terms of worldly possessions, Esau and his descendants are clearly blessed. Both he and his brother Jacob are described as having amassed such wealth (in terms of livestock) that, **"their possessions were too great for them to dwell together."** Esau's family also grew, and eventually grew into the nation of Edom.

What do we make of this? Perhaps most significantly we should be reminded of the words of Jesus that the Lord **"makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."** In His care as the Creator, God provides for the faithful and the unfaithful. We may think this is unfair. We should really think of it as a reminder of God's generosity toward all. Likewise, Esau is a good reminder that earthly blessings don't equal heavenly blessings. In fact, if we stray from God and make anything else our god, those earthly blessings become somewhat of a curse. We can be fooled into thinking God is endorsing us by giving us so much, when in truth He gives to all people in pity for us. The only lasting blessings are found in Him and in His Son, whose generous mercy has extended to us, undeserving though we are.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for all of Your blessings to us – spiritual and material. Help us to constantly seek Your greater gifts of life and salvation in Jesus. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Wednesday, May 19, 2021
Read Genesis 36:20-43

Your Name is in the Book

As was mentioned yesterday in the devotion, the genealogies have become a normal custom in Genesis. As we read through this, it is hard to stay in tune with all of the different people. As we read through the descendants, it can be tough to stay in line with all of the different people that we read about. There are kings and chiefs, and we can read all of these different names.

But what we may not realize or think about, is that these people, each and every one of them and their families, is part of the many nations that God had promised to Abraham and Sarah. We may not think about that, but these people are each a child of God, each a member of His family.

While we may not think much about that, each of us is just like these people, part of God's family. Sometimes we may think just like these different names, that we get passed over. That we simply are just a name in a book. We may think at times that we are passed over just like these names as we read through them.

And you are a name in the book. But it's not a book that your name may get passed over. It isn't a list that you aren't sure how to pronounce the names. Your name is in **the Book of Life**. Your name is written by God, written by Christ. Your name is written among the righteous, just like these names are. Not because of what you or they have done, but because of what Christ did.

Prayer—Gracious, Almighty, and Loving God, we may forget at times about the love YOU have for us. Remind us of that love, and that you have placed us to be counted among the righteous on that last day. Through the name of Jesus Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday, May 20, 2021
Read Genesis 37:1-20

Watch Over Me, Lord!

Often when I look at this story of Joseph, I picture myself as Joseph - set upon by his older brothers in jealousy and fear; But more likely I am the older brothers. I want God's favor; I want to see my life going smoothly (especially when I have done wrong!). And I know that I have done wrong. So, the brothers are more me than Joseph!

Watch over me, Lord! Take away my deep desires. Let me be content to support the blessings you give to others. Paul says he is content in whatever state he is - bring this gift to me, Lord. I want You to bless those others, to continue to let me feel like you favor them over me. Please heal my selfish thoughts.

I thank You, though. You have entered my life, changed out my needs to true needs and not just desires. I can rejoice at Your benefits to others, without worrying about my place with You! I can even forgive others who treat me like those brothers wanted to treat their father's favorite son.

So, then this story has more for me. Here it stands as a warning to me, a warning that God's favor comes where He wills it. And that as sin is crouching at my doors, hoping to catch me out, that I should keep my eyes upon Jesus and not on myself. Their sin tells me to look to Jesus and let Him care for me. I am sure that He will do a better job than I would!

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for letting this story tell me about Joseph's life but also about how dangerous it is to think of myself first. Thank you for being the point and focus of life for me!

Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Friday, May 21, 2021
Read Genesis 37:21-36

Joseph is Sold into Slavery

This story of the sons of Israel selling their brother into slavery because they were jealous of him is not the finest hour in the history of God's people. The only reason they didn't kill Joseph outright is because they saw that there was money to be made from selling their own flesh and blood into slavery. But this is not a story of despair for the family of God. It is a story of tragic irony but also a story of hope. Israel thought that his son was dead. He was lost to the wild beasts and there was nothing left of him to mourn. Jacob was crushed. He was so broken over the seeming death of his beloved son that he himself wanted to die.

But we the readers know that Joseph is not actually dead. He is in a sticky situation, to be sure, but we know that God is with him and will turn the sin of his brothers into his salvation. I am reminded of a phrase that the church used in the first few centuries in prayers and in the writings of the greatest minds of our tradition: the *felix culpa*, the "happy fault." The idea is that the terrible sin that causes the Fall of humanity wasn't all that bad because if we had not sinned, Christ would not have become incarnate and we would not have such a wonderful Savior. Now, I'm not sure we can argue that any sin is good in itself, but we can easily see the idea that what seems bad to us can still end up for the best by God's mercy.

Think of Christ's crucifixion. Surely the disciples must have been devastated by seeing their master die. It was all over. They had set all their hopes on Him, and now all those hopes were dashed. But we know that's not the end of the story for Jesus just as it wasn't for Joseph. Both seemed dead to those that loved them most. And for both, their seeming death turned out to be salvation for those who would hurt them. Just like Joseph's brothers, we have sold Jesus by our sins and given Him over to death. But God had bigger plans. God used Joseph's being sold into slavery to save his brothers from famine, and He used Jesus's death to bring life to us.

Prayer: Lord, forgive us for our grave sins by which we have betrayed Jesus even unto death. Give us mercy so that we are not jealous of those around us but rejoice with them over their good fortune. Strengthen our faith so that we trust in Your almighty power even when all seems lost. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, May 22, 2021

Read [Genesis 38:1-19](#)

“What About Despair”

“The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!” Sometimes, a Bible story doesn’t have any Gospel in it and you have to look elsewhere. This reading is one of those. And yes, “The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!” But you won’t read that here.

Judah took a bride from the Canaanites and fathered three sons through her. Two were **“wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put (them) to death.”** The first-born’s wife, Tamar, now a widow, had no son to carry on her name and care for her, so Judah promised her his third son as a husband when he grew old enough. However, Judah didn’t keep his promise. Seeing her future becoming hopeless, Tamar took matters into her own hands, and disguising her identity as a prostitute, became pregnant by Judah. Before parting ways, she shrewdly asked for three identifying items from Judah. This is the end of the reading for today, but the story will continue Monday.

“The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!” How often does your future look bleak and hopeless? How many times in human history has someone seen things going badly and chosen an evil path to change their future for the better? People tell “little white lies” to not hurt someone (but really just to protect themselves). People say a pregnancy isn’t convenient, or that the child is better off not being born for this or that reason. Wars are fought for pride and power. Every human is guilty of these things because that’s all they could do under the circumstances, right?

That is one response to reaching despair. When your world is crashing down around you, you can “break all the rules” and try to make your life better. That’s what every character in this story did (and failed). That’s what Judas did. That’s what you and I are tempted to do. But, when sin, death, and the devil try to drag you into despair, remember that “The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

The proper response to an encounter with the Law isn’t despair, it’s turning to the Gospel. As you continue to read through this part of Genesis, you’ll see one son of Israel pointing mightily to the best Son of Israel, Jesus. Joseph (while himself a sinful son of Adam), acts righteously to save his people while pre-figuring our eternal Savior.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You have indeed risen from death for me. Keep me turned toward You when life points to despair. In Your Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 24, 2021
Read Genesis 38:20-30

Judah and Tamar's Sins and Sons

When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. And when she was in labor, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

(Genesis 38:27-30)

The genealogy of Jesus Christ gives an account of Judah and his sons by Tamar, Perez and Zerah (see Matt. 1:3; Luke 3:33). Scripture interrupts the account of Joseph sold into slavery by his brothers as Judah has gone down from his brothers, takes a Canaanite wife, and acts immorally with his daughter-in-law resulting in twin sons. Paul E. Kretzmann's *Popular Commentary of the Bible* explains the birth of Judah's sons (see v. 30): [as Zarah] wanted to appear first. The entire story of Tamar, with all the attendant sins, is here told because Pharez, the son of harlotry, became one of the ancestors of Christ, whose suffering and death atoned also for these sins of His forefathers, whose perfect righteousness covers the sin and shame of all men. Cf Mat. 1, 3."

Genealogies are not listed to give readers exercise of name pronunciation or to grumble at the sins committed by blessed sinful descendants of The Offspring Jesus. These names show God's promise fulfilled in Christ, The Offspring. These names also show original sin inherited by the sin of Adam and Eve: Who disobeyed Yahweh by not trusting God's Word of Law to not eat the fruit of the tree lest they die! This sin and death fell upon all mankind as a result. Yet, God's Word of Gospel hope and promise brought justification for sinners through faith alone in the promised Offspring alone.

These God-breathed Words witness Yahweh's promised Offspring/Seed given in Genesis 3:15. It is Jesus the Messiah Who bruised/crushed the head of the serpent, Who was bruise/crushed for our iniquities. It is Jesus the Christ Who redeemed sinful mankind on the cross at the place of the skull. Forgiveness of sins given freely to sinners by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Jesus' blood shed at Calvary set us free from the Law and power of sin, death, and Satan forever. In Jesus, we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Prayer – YAHWEH GOD. You are God and God alone. You created and spoke the universe into existence and breathed the breath of life into our bones through our dear Lord Jesus Christ. Father, You forever remember us by Your Word and promise in Baptism and the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

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

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

Read Genesis 39:1-23

Faithful under Stress

The world doesn't mind pushing us - pushing to make us go its way. Why try, I ask myself, why try when there is nothing there for me! I find that I am always ready to do good work - if I am treated well. But if not, why then I will treat them as I am being treated! But this always jerks me up short.

I am God's child. I want to live His way. And doing to others as they do to me - is not His way! Joseph was truly God's child. He did his best even though he was being mistreated. Still, He was faithful in all his tasks.

And our Lord? He was rejected by the leaders of the country and by the church. The very people who knew the Bible, yet they were not faithful in their work, they rejected the Savior they claimed to wait for. Still, He did not refuse the cross - the cross that MY sins set for Him. He died being faithful - but He also rose again. His resurrection accomplished my salvation. He gave me that gift - yes, I want to be like Him.

He lives with me. In His strength, I can be like Him. With Him, I can be faithful - not because of what I get, but because that's the kind of person I am. The kind of person that He enables me to be. Yes, I will be tempted, but, also, yes, I will be faithful. Thank you, Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, I am grateful for the gift of faithfulness. The gift of Your faithfulness, but also what You have given me. Thank you. Be with me that that gift may be seen in my life as well. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 26, 2021
Read Genesis 40:1-23

Remember Me

Joseph had wonderful news to share with Pharaoh's cupbearer. The Lord showed Joseph the meaning of the cupbearer's dream. (After all, "**do not interpretations belong to God?**") Joseph shared the great news that the cupbearer would be freed from prison and given back his previous place of prominence in the Pharaoh's court. Joseph had only one request, "**only remember me...**"

"Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." Two more years would go by before he remembered (but that story is for tomorrow's devotion). Joseph was once more left to wait even though he could rightly look at his life and say, "**I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.**"

The whole scene echoes across the ages, along with another scene of convicted men. Again, there were three, but all of them would be lifted up. Upon the crosses of Calvary, two were guilty and one was innocent. Yet the request at Calvary was not made by the innocent man. The innocent man willingly suffered, although He "**had done nothing they should**" nail Him to the tree. Even more remarkably, a very unworthy man, a criminal made a request of the innocent man. "**Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.**" In a beautiful statement of mercy, Jesus didn't forget for two years or even two minutes. He responded, "**Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.**"

While others may forget, our Lord Jesus remembers us – every moment of life, in times of trial, and even in the hour of death. In your time "in the pit," you can be certain that Your Lord remembers you.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, remember me. Strengthen me in Your promise that You will never forget me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Thursday, May 27, 2021
Read Genesis 41:1-24

Remember Me

Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Genesis 41:16

Joseph seemed unbelievably patient in suffering and succeeded in prison **"because the LORD was with him"** (Gen. 39:23). Even when the chief cupbearer forgot him for two years. Until Pharaoh dreamed of cows and grain no human wisdom could interpret but God alone. The magicians, wise men, and no one could not interpret his dreams. **"Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, 'I remember my offenses today'"**(v. 9), explaining how the young Hebrew Joseph gave the interpretation of his dream that came to pass. Yet, Joseph was not the True interpreter as it may seem, but Holy Spirit. We see how Joseph said earlier, **"Do not interpretations belong to God?"** (Gen. 40:8). Certainly, *the LORD was with* Joseph working in him through faith by God's will.

Psalm 105 describes Joseph's release giving thanks to Yahweh, which **"tell of all His wondrous works! . . . When He summoned a famine on the land and broke all supply of bread, He had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron; until what he had said came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him. The king sent and released him; the ruler of the peoples set him free; he made him lord of his house and ruler of all his possessions, to bind his princes at his pleasure and to teach his elders wisdom"** (Psalm 105:2; 16-22).

Martin Luther comments on this story of Joseph; "It is a pity that in our sufferings our faith becomes so exceedingly weak. It is therefore of great comfort to us to know that God will not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, as we are told in Isaiah 42:3. But in His own time the Lord showers upon us His abundant help and manifold blessings. That is the comforting lesson we learn from Joseph in Egypt. The kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies. But when it dies, it brings forth much fruit, as Christ says in John 12:24. God is a loving Lord! If only we could believe that.

Prayer – LORD GOD, Your love was manifest for us in Christ Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man. You were glorified and lifted up from the earth casting out the ruler of this world drawing all people to Yourself. In Your death for our sins and resurrection from the dead, we are forgiven and created anew through faith, we have become sons of light as You are the Light so that we may not remain in darkness and have eternal life in Your name. Help us to trust in You always. Amen.

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

Friday, May 28, 2021
Read Genesis 41:25-36

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams

In our passage for today, Joseph interprets for Pharaoh the dream he had. In short, there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph then gives counsel that someone should be appointed to manage the grain supply so that the people would not starve during the seven years of famine.

Perhaps it is lost on us just how clearly God is at work in this story. It is not merely that God gave to Joseph the miraculous power to interpret dreams but that He give Joseph an audience before Pharaoh and after telling Pharaoh to appoint someone over the food, He caused Pharaoh to put Joseph in this position of power. It would be as if a death row inmate gave the president some good advice so he asked him to write the federal budget. God literally pulled Joseph from the pit and set him in a high place. He brought Joseph from death to life and even to a luxurious life.

It is amazing to see how God uses His infinite power to accomplish the salvation of His people. Joseph was nothing to Pharaoh and should have been nothing to God, but because of God's great love, He regards His people as supremely important. He goes so far as to use His power to suffer death on our behalf. In Jesus Christ, we too have been brought out of the pit. And we are brought before a greater King than Pharaoh, God Himself who gives us the exalted place of His children. Just as Joseph lacked nothing as Pharaoh's second-in-command, so we lack nothing as God's children and brothers and sisters of Christ.

Prayer: Lord Almighty, we thank you for the example of Joseph who trusted You and was saved from certain death to life. Lead us also from walking in the paths of death to living according to your life-giving will that we might reflect the new life You have so mercifully

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday May 29th

Read [Genesis 41:37–57](#)

“Joseph Feeds the Earth for Seven Years”

People will do just about anything to get a headline. Have you driven 500 miles to see the “Biggest Ball of Yarn”? Been to Wall Drug Store, South Dakota? How many have slaved their entire life to try to claim the title, “Richest Person in the World”? Read the title of this devotion again – that’s Joseph, before turning 45. No one else in the history of the world to this day can say **“all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain because the famine was severe over all the earth.”** Not even Jesus, who “only” fed 5,000 men (plus women and children) for one day (one meal, really)!

You look back at Joseph’s life, and everything he touched “turned to gold”: from his “amazing technicolor dreamcoat” (and Broadway show by that name), to being put in charge of everything, everywhere he went – even in jail. To his dreams, his **“handsome form and appearance”**, and now being placed second in command of all Egypt (the only superpower of the day).

But that’s not Joseph, at least not the real Joseph. The real Joseph was the 11th of 12 sons. He grew up being more truthful than someone more socially aware knew to be. He was honest to a fault, being falsely accused of attacking his boss’s wife rather than giving in to her endless temptation. When he could have taken credit for his ability to explain dreams, he rather pointed to God’s ownership of that talent. And now, sitting atop his golden world, he called it **“the land of my affliction”**!?

For Joseph, his life – his talents, opportunities, and even disasters – were all gifts from God that he would use while living faithfully to help the people around him. But he knew that his power, riches, and fame weren’t his home, but rather the Land, promised by God to his fathers. That would be his true home.

And he lived so faithfully because he knew he’d still be dead in a pit, or a slave in Egypt, or a prisoner in jail, if God didn’t love him so much that He would one day send a Messiah to save him from his sin. He knew, as Jesus would say Himself, that **“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”** Bread may feed for a day; only God’s promises are true and life-giving for eternity.

Prayer: King of Providence, Your Word is filled with people sharing Your blessings with those around them. Like them, make my life point to You so others may know Your love for them. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 31, 2021
Read Genesis 42:1-17

Remembering

“And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them.” Years have passed since Joseph was left in a pit and sold into slavery by his brothers. Even more time has elapsed since his dreams of having authority over his brothers. During his years in slavery and in prison, those dreams might have been forgotten or seemed like nonsense. But now, after the LORD has allowed him to interpret the dreams of others and his brothers are kneeling before him, Joseph not only remembers the dream, but we see how God has been at work through all of the events in his life, and even in the famine.

After all, events have converged to bring about the Lord’s plan for His people. A famine “happens” to occur in Canaan AND Egypt. Joseph’s brothers “happen” to come before him instead of some other nameless official. Indeed, God is sovereign over all history. Even when things seem out of control, nothing happens that God cannot use for good. Of course, this doesn’t mean that every event is good. Yet in remembering God’s promises to us, we are comforted. We are reminded that despite how bleak and difficult a given day may be, our Lord will deliver on His promises, as He did for Joseph.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, help me remember Your promises to me, especially when the difficulties of the day would cloud my vision. Amen.

PS – Today is a day for remembering. Take a few minutes to read this article ([click here](#)) and remember the sacrifice of soldiers and their families, the work of military chaplains, and the hope that is ours in Christ. Have a blessed Memorial Day.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, June 1, 2021
Read Genesis 42:18-38

Tragedy and Rescue

Tragedy speaks to me! Parental losses - Jacob mourning his lost son; sin rebounding on those embracing it - Joseph's brothers knowing that their father's sorrow is due to their jealous selling of Joseph to get rid of him; those both coming together to make it very difficult to feed the others in the family in a time of drought. They need to go buy food in a foreign land, but Jacob resists, fearing the loss of more sons.

I understand tragedy - oh, maybe not to the extent of Jacob and his family's turmoil, but to me, my losses, my need to face emotional difficulties seem as great to me as to them. I am God's child! But sin has infected the world, including me. Even as I trust in God, live in Him, still wrongness slips in, still I don't look to Him for guidance or I follow my wishes, somehow hoping that God won't notice.

But tragedy is not the end of the story. God does not abandon us. He has his ways! When Jacob and his sons are miserable living in the results of their sins, God is preparing a rescue for them - a double rescue! God has food for the family and a discovery of Joseph to bring a happy ending. And He restores me as well. I am reminded of His love and care as I return to His Word. He brings comfort, resting in Him, with the reminder that He was and is caring for me.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus. Thank you that You showed Your care in the rescue of Jacob, Joseph, and their families. Thank you that You show the same care for me. Please, guide me that I don't follow my desires but always subject them to Your will. Please keep me remembering that You make all things work out good for us who love You. Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, June 2, 2021
Read Genesis 43:1-15

Holding Loosely

Jacob has been well-known for grasping and clinging. When he was born, only a moment after his twin brother Esau, he was grasping his brother's heel. So, he was given the name Jacob, meaning "he takes be the heel" or "he cheats." Jacob grabs his brother's blessing and birthright. Jacob clings all night to the angel of the Lord in a wrestling match. So, God gives him a new name, Israel, which means "struggles with God."

Throughout life, Jacob has been grabbing and grasping, but in today's reading, he holds loosely. **"May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."** This sounds so un-Jacob-y! Jacob has clung to his children (especially Joseph and Benjamin – the children of Rachel) to the point that they have become an idol at times, with Jacob favoring these two over his other children.

Grief, hunger, desperation, need, age (or some combination of these) seem to have been used by God to teach a difficult lesson – to cling to God and hold loosely to everything else. This doesn't mean to be uncaring. Jacob clearly loves Benjamin and doesn't want to send him. But to hold loosely, even to those we love most, means entrusting them to God. After all, those we love are in better hands when in God's care, than if we cling too tightly to try to keep them in our control.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to trust and cling to You, and entrust my loved ones first and foremost to Your gracious care. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Thursday, June 3, 2021
Read Genesis 43:16-34

Peace and Feast

“Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you.” (Genesis 43:23).

Joseph desperately desired to see Benjamin and know of his father Jacob’s wellness and whether he was still alive. In their fear over the money put in their sacks, Joseph’s brothers are still unaware of who Joseph is, thinking **“he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys”** (v. 18). Upon arrival to explain the money sacks bringing gifts, they are comforted by Joseph’s steward with *shalom* – (safe) *completeness, soundness, welfare, Peace*. The steward brought Simeon out to them, and a feast was being prepared for them; they were given water, the servant washed the brothers’ feet, and the donkeys were fed.

Again, Joseph’s brothers bow down to him as his dreams had been fulfilled from Genesis 37 that Joseph’s brothers hated, and being Jacob’s favorite, eventually and deceitfully sold their brother. Things are looking far different than probably expected, and his brothers are still unaware of Joseph’s identity. Before weeping over Benjamin, Joseph said to him, **“God be gracious to you, my son!”** (v. 29), fleeing the room to weep in his deep compassion for his brother. Joseph controls himself and returns, ordering the food to be served.

The brothers are amazed having been arranged in order. From **“the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement”** (v. 33). They were separated by custom not to be defiled, and Benjamin had five times the portion than his brothers, and they were fed and happy. The story continues tomorrow as we will see the brothers will be tested.

Martin Luther commented briefly of Christian compassion: “True religion, as taught in Scripture, does not destroy the natural affections which Christians feel toward one another, but it sanctifies and deepens them” (*Luther’s Commentary on Genesis*). God’s compassion in Christ Jesus’ given for sinful humanity is seen on the cross. It was His joy to suffer and die for us, bringing us true Peace with God, the forgiveness of sins, and everlasting life. In our sin, we deserved eternal death, and Christ has brought Peace and eternal life and prepares us a feast at His table. His true body and blood feeds us with His faith, life, righteousness, forgiveness, and Peace, which we all desperately need. God’s Kingdom comes to us in Jesus Christ: In His Word, in our Baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper as we all await His return at the Resurrection. How gracious is He!

Prayer – Thank You, Father, for Your Goodness and Compassion toward us in Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who brings us Peace forever. Amen.

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

Friday, June 4, 2021
Read Genesis 44:1-17

Joseph Frames Benjamin

In the ESV, this section is titled "Joseph Tests His Brothers," but it seems to be a pretty mean test to me. Joseph has his servants put his prized silver chalice in Benjamin's bag, and when the brothers are found out, they are scared for their lives. They all promise their service to Joseph, an ironic twist considering that they were the very ones who sold Joseph into slavery in the first place. Joseph, though, refuses because that would spoil his plan to see his father again. Israel was still broken up over losing his dearest son and he had sworn that if Benjamin was also taken from him that he would surely die of a broken heart. Joseph knew how losing Benjamin would hurt his father but had plans not only to restore the one son but both lost sons.

This reminds me of the way that God often deals with us. When we are mourning, He doesn't always comfort us immediately. In fact, sometimes He takes even more from us. Yet in the end, He has in store for us even more joy than we could imagine. God teases us like a father teases his children, not out of malicious intent but out of great love and affection. We are hurt by these little games when we forget what kind of merciful and loving Father we have. Even when we find ourselves in a bad situation like Joseph's brothers, we should always remember that God will restore to us something even greater than what we stand to lose. He will not only make things right for us but give us more abundant joy than we are yet prepared to understand. Take the example of Christ, God who had lost all of His children to sin and death gave away also His beloved Son and by doing so received not only His Son but all of His children back. This must have seemed like a cruel trick to the disciples at the time, but it turned out to be a cruel trick on the power of the devil who for a moment had it all but ultimately wound up powerless. So, let us remember always that God is in control, and when He allows us to suffer, He has plans to make us rejoice all the more.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, open our eyes to Your mighty power and teach us to accept Your ways when they are confusing to us. Lead us to rejoice at all times in light of the victory which is already ours and which overcomes every evil of this world. Remove from us our worries about what we lose or gain in this life so that our eyes may be ever fixed on what has been done by Your Son. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday Jun 5th

Read [Genesis 44:18–34](#)

“Favorite Son”

It was no secret: Jacob played favorites. He had a favorite wife – Rachel; he had a favorite son – Joseph. He lavished his love on Joseph with a special coat and other outward signs of his high status over his “lesser” brothers. Now, since Jacob believed Joseph to be dead, he had a new favorite son – Benjamin. Like Joseph, Benjamin was a son of his favorite wife (who had died giving birth to him), and now of the three, he had only one left – Benjamin. Now at least 22 years old, Jacob kept a close hold on his favorite son. He wouldn’t let anything, or anyone take away the joy of his life.

But now, this strange man of Egypt was putting pressure on Jacob to allow his favorite son to go there, from where Jacob knew he’d never return. This second in command of the greatest nation in the world seemed to have taken a personal interest in tearing the love of his life from him. This man held as prisoner Simeon (2nd oldest son) to entice Jacob to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt. Jacob was now torn – he wanted to save Simeon, but not at the cost of his favorite! But they all needed food, so he’d finally consented.

When Joseph was young, his brothers hated him for their father’s unfair favoritism. They’d sold him into slavery (to die) because of this injustice. Now, the shame and guilt of what they’d done was bearing fruit. They were trapped in Egypt, trying to bargain for their lives and feeling the noose tighten around their necks. They knew their father would die before allowing Benjamin to go to Egypt but had talked him into it. Now, though, the favorite son was caught as a thief in Egypt and the man was not listening to their best arguments for freeing him.

What a story! Stay tuned; Monday’s reading isn’t the end of the “Joseph Story” but resolves this episode. The lesson today? Don’t play favorites with your kids? Don’t sell your siblings into slavery? Those are good, but “No”. This story illustrates (to us thick-headed readers) the amazing love of God for His favorite son. He loved His favorite son so much He couldn’t bear to lose him. He loved His favorite son so much He knew His **“gray hairs would go with sorrow to Sheol”** if he were to die. God the Father would give up anything, He’d do anything because of His extreme, overwhelming, all-encompassing love for His favorite son. He’d even give His only Son, Jesus, for that “favorite son”.

Who is God’s favorite son? It’s you.

Prayer: God our Father, your love for me is so unbelievable as to sound ridiculous! Thank You for revealing its enormity to me through the life of Your servant, Joseph. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, June 7, 2021
Read Genesis 45:1-15

It was not you who sent me here, but God

After a series of tests, “Joseph could not control himself.” Everyone else was sent out from the room, so that Joseph could tell his brothers the secret he had been hiding. “I am Joseph!” These had to be the most terrifying words that his brothers had ever heard. They had thrown him in the pit. They had sold him into slavery. They may have suspected that he would be dead. They did not expect him to be the second most powerful man in Egypt! They feared what revenge that Joseph might extract from them.

Instead (and not for the last time), Joseph comforted his brothers. His brothers were concerned about payback for what they had done. Joseph had a very different perspective:

“God sent me before you to preserve life.”

“God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on the earth.”

“So, it was not you who sent me here, but God.”

As Joseph looked back across the extraordinary events of his life, he could have been bitter, and seen all the difficulty as the poisonous fruit of his brothers’ betrayal. In faith, Joseph saw the working of God. Only by that strange and awful path, could Joseph have been put in his current position. That didn’t mean his brothers were right. That didn’t mean Joseph was treated justly by Potiphar’s wife. It did mean that God was at work (in spite of them) to accomplish His purposes for Joseph and all His people – even the brothers who betrayed Him.

Such is the mercy of our God, who is at work in the midst of all things for the eternal good of His people. After all, this is how our salvation has been won – by the strange and awful path to the cross, that, nevertheless, has won eternal life for us.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, when difficulty comes in my life and I am treated unjustly, remove all bitterness from my heart. Turn my eyes to the patient love of Jesus, and trust in Your eternal promises. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, June 8, 2021
Read Genesis 45:16-28

A God Who Cares

When I look at the world, my heart quails. Troubles everywhere, unhappiness in all parts of the world! The solution is to look at our God. He is in control, and all things happen under His control. The Psalmist tells us "A thousand will fall at your right hand!" God brings His people through safely.

Jacob who thought he had lost his son, found him again - by God's providing. And, not only found him but found that God had cared for him the whole time! We worry and fret - when God is not only already solving our problems. No, He is using them to accomplish many more good things, we could not even imagine.

The troubles I have, the sorrows that I fight and worry about, hide my God from me! How I need His Word to remind me that others have seen God bring happy solutions to them, to remind me to look to my Savior for care. He never fails me.

It is so easy to assume that I know what is good for me and others, just as Jacob thought for his son. But to do that implies that I am better than God. And I really know better than that. How foolish I am - to hug my problems to myself, to insist on my solutions when I have a God who cares for me and promises to do better than I can ask or think about! I rejoice when I read of Jacob's joy, knowing that God has such things for me as well.

Prayer: Thank you, God. Thank You for caring for Jacob and his family so well. Thank You that I can look forward to Your care for me and my family as well. Please, keep me looking to You, to using Your Word, and living the life You have given me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, June 9, 2021
Read Genesis 46:1-27

Listen for the Rhymes

Mark Twain is credited with the quip, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme." Twain was certainly on to something in the way that God works amongst His people, and in pointing to the work of the Savior.

Abraham (then Abram) had already traveled down to Egypt in a time of distress. A famine led him and Sarai to seek food and respite, but before long Abram was on his way back to the land promised by God with a bounty as he returned home. (Gen. 12)

Here in Genesis 46, Jacob is told by God to travel down to Egypt in this time of distress. He is promised, "**I will make you a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again.**" This time, the fulfillment of that promise took much longer, but by the time Moses looked over the Jordan River at the end of his life, the family of Jacob/Israel had become a nation, God clearly was with His people to bring them out of Egypt by plagues and wonders, and they were able to return to the promised land. (Exodus)

These sojourns to Egypt were earlier rhymes of the main story of history. Joseph, Mary, and the young Jesus would travel down to Egypt in a time of distress, only to return when the murderous Herod was no longer a threat to Jesus's life (Matthew 2). And even this account was rhyme to the grand story of what Jesus had come to do: go down into the bondage and slavery of sin in His suffering and death on the cross, in order to free us from sin and death. He rose, paving the path to the eternal promised land through faith in Him and sharing with us an everlasting inheritance, a bounty beyond imagination when we go home.

Spending these weeks in the book of Genesis, perhaps you've become better attuned to listen for the rhymes of God's great salvation that is realized in Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, Your mercy extends and is enriched across the ages. Help me ever to see in Your Word, echoes and rhymes of Your mercy for me and for all in Jesus. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Thursday, June 10, 2021
Read Genesis 46:28-34

Israel meets Joseph in Goshen

It is significant how Israel came to Goshen in Egypt and was set apart from the Egyptians, as “**every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians**” (v. 34). We remember last week how the Egyptians were not to eat with “**the Hebrews**” (Genesis 43:32), as this was also an abomination. Undoubtedly, more abominations were between these people groups. Perhaps we see there are a variety of abominations globally among all people in the world today. Nevertheless, Joseph has reunited with his father Israel (Jacob) in Egypt, and God set His people apart.

Judah is sent ahead of Jacob to meet with Joseph in Goshen. Joseph wept on his father’s neck for a good while, and Israel is now ready to die, “**Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive**” (v. 30). This is amazing, God promised to be with Jacob, telling him to go down to Egypt and bring him up again, and how Joseph would close his eyes, “**I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes**” (Gen. 36:4). God was with Jacob in his life and death, promising a return to the promised land.

This should point us significantly to the life and death of Christ Jesus, the promised offspring/seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God’s Son had also gone to Egypt to fulfill Scripture, as the prophet Hosea had written, “**When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt, I called my son**” (Hosea 11:1; see Matthew 2:15). Jesus returned to the land promised to the patriarchs. Just as the Israelites were led out of Egypt through the Red Sea to the promised land. Jesus returned from Egypt to die and rise again from the dead for us, to bring us into paradise with Him.

God is with us. His promise is ours in Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, for freedom and declaration of righteousness from sin and receiving His eternal life, righteousness, and sanctification. This is eternally significant! Significant for all the Baptized given faith. To trust all the promises of God in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Amen. In Jesus, in our Baptism into His death, we are forgiven and renewed.

Prayer – Heavenly Father, You are gracious and merciful to sinners for the sake of Christ Jesus Your Son our Lord. Help us to follow You and do Your will always in this world in all matters. Help us always see and remember in Baptism; You created us anew. You brought us from death to life by Your mercy, by the washing and regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom You poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

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

Friday, June 11, 2021
Read Genesis 47:1-12

Joseph provides for his family

Joseph's family reminds me a lot of what people want today: a place to live, a good job, and enough food to put on the table. This is all that Joseph asks for Pharaoh to provide for his brothers and father and their families. The request is granted easily enough but not before Jacob tells Pharaoh that the 130 years of his life have been short and evil. This seems like a very strange thing to say in any case but especially so for a 130-year-old man who has really not had all that bad of a life. There are certainly many people who had it worse than Jacob. But maybe Jacob was thinking of the present, about the famine that was threatening to kill everyone he knew and loved. He looked back on his life and saw that it had all led up to his whole family perishing horribly. No matter what, God decided to enrich Jacob once again. Joseph was allowed to give to his family the best of the land and everything they needed not only to survive but to prosper.

How merciful is God in everything he provides to us! He gives us a place to live and food for our mouths. No matter how bad the situation looks to be or how bitter we feel our lives have been, God has mercifully brought us wherever we are and has won for us the best of the land. Though the days of our sojourning on this earth are short and evil, still God has in store for us the best of the land a heavenly Promised Land, a precious New Creation. If He provides for us now everything we need to sustain ourselves, how much greater will be His gifts to us when He comes in glory to raise the living and the dead, to give us life, gainful labor, and heavenly provision.

Prayer: Jesus, you have provided us all that we need. Guard and defend us in the short and evil years of this life and teach us to be thankful for all the blessings that you graciously give us. Lead us also to the Promised Land that You have won for us with Your glorious victory over death and every evil. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday Jun 12th

Read [Genesis 47:13-31](#)

“Plenty of Famine”

If you're like me, after packing away Thanksgiving dinner (or successfully getting your money's worth at Golden Corral), you might think that you could never be hungry again. You ate until your stomach hurts, you've loosened your belt, the stretch marks are doing their thing, and you wonder “maybe I overdid it?” But, the very next morning, you're ready to eat again. You marvel at the fact that you're actually *hungry*! No, we can't go long without food.

The famine in Egypt had progressed to its third year. The peoples of Egypt and Canaan had been coming to Joseph for food, but were now out of money with which to pay for more. But they needed food. If a day of fasting is too much for us, seven years is obviously impossible. So, they willingly traded their livestock for food. That's not a sustainable sacrifice just to stay alive. Imagine trading your car for food – how could you live without being able to get to work or school, or go to the grocery store?!

But the next year, they again needed food but now had no money nor livestock. But they were hungry; they needed food. So, again willingly, they offered to give to Pharaoh their land and future labor in exchange for food now. It's hard for us in America to imagine that, but when the choice is between starvation and working the land to make a rich king richer, the food looks pretty good.

The fading pandemic demonstrated this to all of us – to save our lives, we shut down schools, businesses, commerce – the very things necessary for life. Our nation took on tremendous debt with no vision for how to handle it. But, without those things, life itself grinds to a halt, we become impoverished, and we become hungry. We *need* food, home, jobs, and transportation. Like the Egyptians in the story, we need sustenance.

But God, working in His mysterious ways, provided for all the people. Through His servant Joseph, they were all fed and their lives eventually returned to normal. Israel found a new (temporary) home in Egypt where they prospered and grew into a nation. And one day, from that nation, Jesus would come with the message, **“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”**

Prayer: Bread of Life, thank You for “feeding” us during this COVID “famine”, and especially thank You for providing an eternal feast for us with You. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, June 14, 2021
Read Genesis 48:1-12

More Than Expected

And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your offspring also."

Anyone could understand Israel (Jacob's) outlook, his son had been gone for years. His other sons had convinced him that Joseph had died. He had long ago given up any notion that he would be able to see Joseph again. To see his son once more was as extraordinary and unexpected grace. Yet that was not all! Israel also got to see his grandsons as well. He realized that every bit of this was an incredible grace. To be able to see his son and grandsons for even a moment is far more than Israel ever could have expected.

With our sin in view, we should not expect the mercy that we are shown on a regular basis by our God. Our sin (not just our wrong thoughts, words and actions, but the inborn condition and bent away from God) should separate us from our holy God. Yet such is the mercy of God that He **"makes it to rain on the just and the unjust"** (Matthew 5:45). His mercy is so abundant that He provides for all people with blessings far beyond what we deserve. All the more, through Christ, we are forgiven and reunited by faith with God our Father. Through the grace of Christ and the working of the Spirit in our hearts, we are able to see that our God is the giver of **"every good and perfect gift"** (James 1:17). Any good that we have in this life and for life eternal is a product of His generous grace. There is nothing that we deserve, and yet we are showered with good gifts of family, forgiveness, life, and life eternal. Indeed, He grants to us daily more than we should have ever expected.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, open my eyes to see Your infinite gifts of grace, and thus lead me to continual thanks for all Your many blessings that You shower on me.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, June 15, 2021
Read Genesis 48:13-22

All My Life

My life may be long - or it may be short. But throughout it all, God has been with me, watched over me, guided me, and re-directed me when I needed it. So for Jacob, so for me! Oh, I am tempted to complain - to say that God should have done differently, He should have given me more, kept off the rain from my life. But that would be silly. I know that He is with me and has kept off many more troubles that I never even noticed.

Rather let me say. I am thankful to God for the troubles He did let me have. I thought they were bad, I bitterly complained to Him; but He always knew better - and, thankfully, did not listen to me. Troubles make one grow. Troubles prune away pride and self-congratulations. Troubles focus my attention on the One who triumphs, making my heart right again.

But I am also thankful for the happiness and excitement that God has brought into my life. I didn't plan for all that joy, rather while I was worried about troubles, God brought goodness in spite of my efforts. Thank you God. I am so thankful that He doesn't give up on me, that He guides all my life so that as I look back on it (and it doesn't matter how long it has been in years - Whenever I look back, at a young age or older, in either case, it is still all my life!) whenever I look back on my life, I see only the joy, as He has brought good out of evil and comforted me from my sorrows.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord. Thank you for being You - for being my Savior, for making my life worth living, and in so doing letting me be a part of Your Kingdom. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, June 16, 2021
Read Genesis 49:1-27

Jacob's Last Words

Jacob knew that his time was short. We all know that experience. We know what it is like to need to say goodbye. It could be, like with Jacob, when a loved one is taking their final breaths. For Jacob, he knew that he was the one taking his final breaths. Of course, for us it could be a different sort of goodbye – taking a new job and moving away, heading off to college, or any number of the partings that happen in this life. In those moments when time is short, our words often take on greater urgency.

This is all the more true with Jacob. His words are a mixture of blessing, prayer, and prophecy. For each of his sons, he shares a final word. Some of the words are difficult to hear. Reuben, Simon, and Levi all receive a final word that sounds more like a curse, but perhaps they are just words that reveal the working out of their sinful choices. Such words are hard to hear, but sometimes we need such frank descriptions of our sins and their consequences to lead us to repentance.

Then there are the glorious and gracious words spoken to two of the sons, in particular. Joseph is given a lengthy prayer of blessing. Some is a rehearsal of God's provision for Joseph in the midst of numerous challenges, but some looks also to future blessings – bountiful agriculture, large families, and successful leadership. Jacob looks into Joseph's future and sees a life better for him than Jacob knew.

Yet while Joseph had been Jacob's favorite (which had been the source of so many problems), the greatest promises are reserved for Judah. Or perhaps the greatest promises are reserved for us through Judah. His will be the line of kings. The coming kingdom will be marked by celebration and would one day command obedience from all the peoples. Judah himself would not see such glory, and truth be told, even David (from Judah's line) did not see this degree of glory. For that, we wait for the final appearing of the great king from Judah's line, our Lord Jesus.

So, Jacob's final words are quite helpful to us. If given one final chance to speak, what would we say? Joseph speaks to his beloved sons. He encourages them, yet he also confronts their sins. And He pointed them to the King of Kings, who is our great Hope. Such words are worth sharing on all occasions.

Prayer: Lord, let me use my time well, and speak of my Hope in Christ, the Lion of Judah. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Thursday, June 17, 2021
Read Genesis 49:28-33

Gathered to His People

“When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.” Genesis 49:33

Jacob blesses his sons, **“the twelve tribes of Israel . . . blessing each with a blessing suitable to him”** (v. 28). Jacob also charged his sons to bury him with his fathers, Abraham and his wife Sarah, Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and his wife Leah were buried in the cave in the field in the land of Canaan that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite. Jacob was to be **“gathered to [my/his] people”** (vv. 29, 33). This is a fascinating gem in God’s Word after Jacob *“breathed his last and was gathered to his people.”*

It could be easy to assume that this was primarily about where Jacob was buried. Yet, Jacob had just *died, breathed his last, or, as other versions might say, yielded/give up the ghost*. Notably, Abraham was *gathered to his people* just after his death (see Gen. 25:8). This helps us see God’s living Church in paradise after bodily death. The souls of saints received into eternity/heaven with God through faith in Christ, awaiting the new heaven and new earth. This is far more than interesting. To be **“gathered to his people”** here in Scripture is quite beautiful and extraordinary.

Martin Luther commented. “This is a most beautiful expression and was written by the Holy Spirit with great diligence for our learning, for they prove that there is a place where God’s elect saints are gathered together with their precious Lord when they die. Their bodies are placed in the grave, but their souls are with the Lord in joy and peace. Therefore the death of His saints is precious in the sight of the Lord, as we read in Psalm 116:15. There, in heaven with Christ, is no more pain, but perfect peace. There is no more affliction, but only blessedness. We cannot describe this glorious place fitly, but we know that there is a rest for the children of God whose glory passes our understanding.” (*Luther’s Commentary on Genesis*).

Prayer – Heavenly Father, as we wait here on earth, our blessed hope in Christ Jesus, give us patience in suffering and tribulation and bring us joy in Your Name we were Baptized into, reminding us we are forgiven and created new in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

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

Friday, June 18, 2021
Read Genesis 50:1-14

The Burial of Israel

We've all experienced the tragedy of a family funeral, not only the somber reminder of the death of a distant relative but the painful loss of someone important to us. The death of Jacob was literally a national tragedy. The mourning went on for months and the final funeral proceedings were so over-the-top that the locals renamed the place. The sons of Israel were broken up about their beloved patriarch's passing.

Even though Jacob was an old man near death's door, it was still overwhelmingly painful to see him go. We know all too well what it's like to lose an older relative. Just like Jacob went to be buried in the Promised Land, we see our loved ones go to be with the Lord without us and we are stuck in our Egypt, a foreign land where we have no business being.

But we also have the promise from our God that this is not the final goodbye. Jacob went to be with his fathers in death and we know that we will one day go to be with our ancestors in death. What's more, we will rejoin them in life. This is only a temporary separation from those we want more than anything to see again. Christ has crushed the sin that separates us from God and the death that separates us from one another. We are blessed when we mourn because Christ will comfort us not with empty promises but with the sure hope that the power of death is fading away day by day and cannot keep us from those we love forever. Christ has reunited us with God and will reunite us with those who have gone before us to death with the power of His incorruptible life.

Prayer: O God of Jacob, we thank You for the saints who have gone before us in a faithful life and showed us how to die a faithful death in Your love. Open the eyes of our hearts that in our mourning we would be comforted with the knowledge of our coming reunion with all of those who have gone to be with You. Lord Jesus, come quickly and make a final end of the old foes of sin, death, and devil whom You defeated once and for all through Your glorious resurrection. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, June 19, 2021

Read [Genesis 50:15-26](#)

“Genesis”

Genesis – a book about the Beginning, the first revelation of God’s Word. A book telling about the “generations of mankind”. This incredible book told us how God created a perfect world – man and woman, plants, animals – and no death. Adam and Eve walked with and talked directly to God in Paradise. But then, tempted by Satan, they sinned and drew all mankind, and the world with it, into pain, suffering, and death that continues to our generation. But God promised a Savior.

People lived together, becoming so thoroughly evil they caused God to send a worldwide flood to cleanse His Creation and start fresh. But God saved a faithful remnant through washing with water, using Noah and his family to embody this salvation. He blessed them and they were fruitful and multiplied. These multitudes again strove to “be like God” by building the Tower of Babel to show their greatness. But God confused their languages, scattering them to the corners of the world.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, again and again, were promised by God to become a great nation, to become more numerous than the stars and grains of sand, and to be given a Land to be their home. We heard stories of lies, deceit, and deception; as well as tales of faithfulness that moved mountains – from these very same people.

And, finally, we read about Joseph, a man used by God to save the world from a seven-year famine. In today’s reading, his brothers still can’t comprehend Joseph’s faith, lying to their brother yet again to try to avoid his vengeance. But Joseph’s response resonates to our generation today: **“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”**

Joseph understood God’s love, as demonstrated by His promises. God loves all of humanity so much that He goes to every length to save our lives. He feeds the hungry – both believer and unbeliever – with food for the stomach. And He feeds our souls for eternal life by His greatest promise: the Messiah, made immediately after sin entered the world.

Genesis? It’s a book about a loving God Who makes and keeps promises to all people down to you and me today as demonstrated over and over through His care for His Church, the new Israel.

Prayer: Heavenly Father – Creator, Savior, and Comforter – thank you for Your Word, passed down to us through Genesis. Through it, fill us with Your Word of Life: Jesus. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson