

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: God's creation delights and astonishes.
All: **Let the people pause and wonder!**
One: God, the Creator, has made it all.
Let all creation shout and sing!
All: **Alleluia!**

***OPENING HYMN** "All Creatures of Our God and King" GtG 15 (*Verses 1-4 & 6*)

**1. All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
O brother sun with golden beam,
O sister moon with silver gleam,
sing praises! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**2. O brother wind with clouds and rain,
you nurture gifts of fruit and grain.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
O sister water, flowing clear,
make music for your Lord to hear.
Sing praises! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**3. O brother fire, so warm and bright,
chase off the shadows of the night.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Dear mother earth, who day by day
unfolds such blessings on our way,
sing praises! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

4. All who for love of God forgive,
all who in pain or sorrow grieve,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Christ bears your burdens and your fears;
so, even in the midst of tears,
sing praises! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

6. O sisters, brothers, take your part,
and worship God with humble heart.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
All creatures, bless the Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit, Three in One!
Sing praises! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

God of all people, we confess to you our rivalries and deceit. We have not lived by the best that we know. We have identified as enemies persons who are different from us, while you call us to be family. We have closed our eyes to needs around us, afraid of what we might lose if we respond. We have received in abundance and made skimpy return. You have given us life, and we have hoarded it as our own. O God, forgive us. Move us out of our tiny orbits of self-interest that we may dare to embrace all people as your own and our neighbors. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from Romans 5)*

One: "God proves God's love for us in that, while we still were sinners, Christ died for us. If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of God's Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life."

All: **Through the death of Christ we are forgiven. By the resurrection of Christ we are given new life. So rejoice and be glad in the good news! For God loves us today and tomorrow and always! Alleluia!**

***THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, a honk of the horn, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Genesis 25:19-34

GENESIS 25:19-34 (various)

¹⁹ This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac. ²⁰ Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel (an Aramean from Mesopotamia) and sister of Laban. ²¹ Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, since she was unable to have children. The Lord was moved by his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² The children struggled against each other in her womb, and she said, "If this is what it's like, why did it happen to me?" So she went to ask the Lord. ²³ The Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."

²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.

²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, who stayed at home among the tents. ²⁸ Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹ Once when Jacob was boiling stew, Esau came in from the open country, hungry. ³⁰ Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."

³² Esau said, "Look, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?" ³³ But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

³⁴ So Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew. He ate, drank, got up, and left, showing just how little he thought of his birthright.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

We begin with conflict.

Whoa! That's a mouthful!

'You don't need to tell me about conflict', you say. 'Look all around us.'

Yes; but recognize, this passage, though it deals with a conflictual situation and certainly acknowledges the reality of conflict in our lives -- this passage does not give us a plan for how to eliminate (or even mitigate) conflict.

The story indeed suggests that conflict is inevitable...or at least seemingly inevitable: i.e., very prevalent in human history and human relations and human dealings with each other.

‘No duh!’ you say.

As one person pointed out, the conflict we have in our story for today runs the gamut from familial to tribal to cultural to international.

From Jacob vs. Esau (with their parents unhelpfully taking sides), to Israelites (descendants of Jacob) vs. Edomites (descendants of Esau), to hunters (Esau, man of the open country) vs. shepherds (like Jacob, more inclined to tents and a ‘pastoral’ life).

The conflict runs deep.

The conflict runs long.

The conflict continues to run, and run, and run.

Is all doomed for eternity?

Is there no hope?

Are Jacob and Esau, and all of us, for that matter, relegated to living steeped in conflict for all our days?

Let us look further into the story.

Again, remember: this passage does not give us a plan, per se, for how to deal with conflict. But it does acknowledge the reality of conflict, and also suggests hope, even in the midst of conflict.

So, we look further -- deeper -- into the story...

...And notice grace.

Isaac experiences an inner (conflict) turmoil; so, too, we presume, does Rebekah, for she is childless. A major blow to the family: to personal dreams and cultural expectations. But even more damaging, a major blow to the promise of God: a promise regarding legacy and descendants...and blessing. A promise in jeopardy, because there is no heir.

Sound familiar? Remember, his father Abraham dealt with a similar difficulty.

Isaac experiences an inner turmoil, and so Isaac prays to God.

And notice that lovely phrase: “The Lord was moved by his prayer.”

The Lord was moved by his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

Who says prayer doesn’t make a difference? Oh, maybe not in the way we want; maybe not always with the focused expectation and answer that Isaac knew.

But prayer does make a difference.

Because we pray to a God who is “moved by” our prayers. We pray to a God of deep and infinite compassion: compassion for you and me in our plight and our prayers.

The grace of a God who hears, and responds.

Of course, the pregnancy was probably not of Rebekah’s dreams, for

The children struggled against each other in her womb.

One source said they “crushed each other” (Texts - James Newsome). Talk about conflict!

Of course Rebekah would be troubled:

“If this is what it’s like, why did it happen to me?”

‘Why me?’ How many times have we asked *that* question?

So Rebekah, too, prays to God.

And the answer she received may not have been to her liking. But that, too, as we have mentioned, is part of the experience, and even grace, of prayer.

The Lord answers,

**“Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated; (or “at odds”)
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger.”**

We have here the actual focus of our story. For here we have a statement of divine election (as it is called): of God’s choosing. And it is not what we would expect.

Two peoples are gestating within Rebekah, and already -- before they are even born, before they have begun to make a mark on society or even their family, before they have had a chance to prove their worth (or not) -- God has chosen one over the other: God has chosen the older to serve the younger. And that is a complete reversal of societal and cultural expectations, where the first born -- the oldest -- would typically get the lion’s share of the inheritance and influence, the power and prestige.

No reason is given for the choice. God simply, and sovereignly, chooses.

And we are expected to live with the choice.

Oh, yes, as the story continues, we find that Jacob is more than willing to do whatever he can to advance his own position (whether he is aware of God’s choice, or not).

And some would easily, and justifiably, say that God’s choice -- God’s election -- God’s calling, if you will -- is part of the cause of the conflict.

But that should come to us as no surprise.

For do we not claim a sense of being chosen by God -- having been called by God -- as we seek to follow our Lord? *“I chose you,”* he said to his inner circle that fateful night (John 15:16).

We have been chosen. We have been called. And answering that call can very easily lead us straight into conflict, for we seek to walk in a way and affirm a life that contradicts the world and runs counter to the values and affirmations of the world.

So let us not be naive and simplistic: God has a hand in the conflict we experience. But only because God chooses to direct us down a path we tend not to choose on our own.

But we may be too quick to try to blame God, and God’s choice, as the source of our conflict.

‘Why did God have to play favorites?’ we may ask.

Of course, Peter would (much later) remind his friends, and us, that God shows no partiality (Acts 10).

But showing no partiality does not mean God does not choose.

So maybe we have too narrow, too limited, an understanding of God’s choosing.

For God's choosing, God's calling -- God's election -- is not to privilege, but to purpose...and mission.

You see, there will be enough problems and difficulties, and conflict, for the 'chosen one', Jacob. His election is not a piece of cake. Election is not to privilege and 'easy street'. Election is to the hard road of God's purpose and mission, even mission to the world and even parts of the world we may not like.

Remember, Jacob's election is to the same call as Abraham: a name and descendants, and to be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12).

So, Jesus would say to his disciples,

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit.... (John 15:16)

You see? Calling to a purpose, to a mission.

And there is wonder and grace in that calling.

Why choose Jacob? He turns out to be a conniver, a cheat, an opportunist, a scoundrel. Yet God chooses him; and God is able, in spite of Jacob, to work through him to bring blessing to the world and work grace in his life.

Why choose any of us? We all have our faults and short-comings, and downright rebellious tendencies. Some of us are just better at hiding our self-interest than others. Yet still, I dare to say, God is able, in spite of us, to work through us to bring blessing to the world and work grace in our life.

So maybe the bigger question -- the better question -- to ask: Is Jacob the only one God chose?

Remember: Jacob, like his ancestor Abraham, was called to be a blessing to *all* the nations/families (Genesis 12:3). That would, by definition, include Edom, i.e., Esau and his descendants.

Think about it -- 'big picture' thinking -- Esau may not have been chosen for the expected role -- the rights of the first born -- but does that mean he wasn't called to a role at all?

The answer to that question may take a number of years.

For on another landscape many years hence, the two conflicted and conflicting brothers will meet again ... after Jacob had fled his homeland for fear of Esau's murderous anger; after spending many years earning his keep, and his wives, from his uncle Laban, and conniving him as well; while returning to his homeland, uncertain how Esau will respond. And for all of Esau's history of anger, for all his stupidity at giving up his birthright so easily, for all his burning anger when he discovers Jacob has truly succeeded in swindling him from his birthright and his father's blessing -- for all of that (being bested by Jacob, being betrayed by Jacob), it is Esau -- not Jacob -- it is Esau that is the gracious one in their moment of re-connecting.

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. (Genesis 33:4)

Now, how God worked on Esau's heart and worked through him, molding him to be that greeter of grace, we do not know; we are not told, at least in this rendition of the story. It seems the grace of God may be hidden, mysterious, inscrutable in its working. For, instead of resentment smoldering for decades and bursting at the seams, instead we have grace spilling out onto the neck and life of Jacob, all from his bested and betrayed brother, Esau.

And if that's not grace, I don't know what is.

Perhaps Esau was chosen for just such a moment as that.

For what have you been chosen?

To what have you been called?

To the role you, and others, expect?

Or to another?

God is not in the business of stirring up conflict, except in so much as it is necessary to get us (back) on the right path.

But God is in the business of sharing grace and blessing -- even through people such as Jacob, and Esau...and us.

Let us seek to live by that grace, work with that grace, trust in that grace; as God brings about the plans and goodness God has promised for all God's people, for all people -- those who think they are chosen, and even those who do not.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

We trust in God,

whom Jesus called Abba, Father.

In sovereign love God created the world good

and makes everyone equally in God's image,

male and female, of every race and people,

to live as one community.

But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.

Ignoring God's commandments,

we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,

accept lies as truth,

exploit neighbor and nature,

and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.

We deserve God's condemnation.

Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

In everlasting love,

the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people

to bless all families of the earth.

**Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.
Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.**

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: God of grace...
People: ...hear our prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (*Contemporary*)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**We give you thanks, O God, for your wonderful bounty to us.
Remind us again and again that all good things come from you. Teach us the
way of grateful hearts. And receive the offering of our lives, that we might
give even as we have received. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “God of All Nations” [*Tune: 819*]

**God of all nations struggling to be first,
Speak to your people on this changing earth.
We will not fear, for you will quench our thirst,
Granting our bodies food, our spirits worth.
We will rejoice and open up our hearts
To know compassion that your love imparts.**

**When we despair and lose the will to live,
When our divisions lead to strife and war,
Show us a refuge and alternative,
Your reconciliation to explore.
We will rejoice, for you have set us free
From lesser loyalties and rivalry.**

**When we were sinners, we did not deserve
Love’s healing pardon you in Christ conferred.
Now, by the strength of Christ, empower’d to serve,
We see the harvests waiting for your word.
We will rejoice to teach and preach and heal,
Enriched by prayer, your purpose to reveal.**

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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