

SERMON  
First Lutheran Church  
Aitkin, Minnesota

Genesis 27:1-4, 15-23; 28:10-17  
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Some people think that church is made up of a bunch of **holier than thou hypocrites**, who act like they are such wonderful people, such faithful followers of Jesus on Sunday, and then turn around and knife you in the back on Monday. Maybe that's true.

Today we hear **Jacob's story**. He came from a good family tree. Genesis tells us that Jacob is a part of the family of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham is the fellow, who along with his wife, Sarah, was called by God to be the **father of God's trusting people**. God promised to love, care for and bless Abraham and Sarah **in order that** all the people of the world might experience God's love and blessing through them. Jacob is Abraham and Sarah's **grandson**. In our reading for today, God makes the same promise of love, care and blessing to Jacob – **in order to bring God's love, care and blessing to all people** – including you and me. **Jacob is a child of God.**

Do you remember Jacob's story? He is the younger brother of twins. He came out of his mother's womb clutching his older brother Esau's foot. Later he tricked his older brother out of the first born's **birth rite**. In today's reading, Jacob, along with his scheming mother, lied to Jacob's dying father, in order to steal his older brother's death bed **blessing**. Then Jacob fled for his life from enraged Esau and headed for his grandfather's birthplace, **Haran**. On his way, in this text, Jacob receives a **message of hope and renewed blessing from God.**

Jacob settles in that distant land, falls in love with Rachel, and at his future father-in-law's command, works several years to earn the right to marry Rachel. The father-in-law then tricks Jacob and he ends up marrying Rachel's older sister, Leah. After several more years of work, he is finally allowed to marry beloved Rachel. Along the way, he outsmarts and tricks his father-in-law and prospers as a shepherd. Finally, Jacob decides to go home and face the music with his brother,

Esau. On the way, Jacob sends his wives and children out ahead to serve as a shield from his brother's wrath and soldiers. Once more he receives a dream of hope and blessing from God. His brother forgives him and reconciliation happens.

Are there any parts of your life and family that sound at all like Jacob's life and family? Ups and downs. Doubts and fears. Mistakes and consequences. Hopes and dreams. Blessings and love. Jacob's story comes to us from the Bible. Jacob is **one of God's chosen, precious and beloved people**. **And Jacob is a sinner, scoundrel** and **knives his brother**, his **family** and **God** in the back several times. What's the deal?

**God**, in our text and throughout scripture, seems to have a bad habit of hanging around with less than savory folks, putting up with a hell of a lot of trouble and shenanigans and then still loving, caring for and bringing about **good in their lives**. Then God somehow even manages to bring about **good in lots of other lives through them**. Guess what. What may look like a **hopeless ending for you or me**, may indeed be a **new beginning for God**.

Jacob is the great, great, great... **grandfather of Jesus**. God moved through scoundrel, Jacob, to eventually bring Jesus to our world, to us, to you. And look at the dozen men that Jesus gathered to help start the Christian church. Judas sold him out for thirty pieces of silver. Peter denied him three times when Jesus most needed him. All the rest ran away and hid. Only John stayed at the foot of Jesus' cross to care for Jesus' mother, Mary. **These were God's chosen people**.

Maybe the Christian church is just a collection of hypocrites. Do you see it in Jacob's story? It's not so much about what **others think of us**. It's not even so much about what we **think of ourselves**. **It's all about what God thinks of us**. God created us to be in a **love/trust relationship with God** and with each other. We break that relationship again and again – with God and with the people in our lives. **But, God won't give up on us**. God is constantly moving to heal and renew us individually and in relationship with God and the people around us.

**Jesus**, the God, who **meets us here today**, is the One:

- who comes **not to judge and destroy** us,
- **but to love and rescue us**, to give us deep, rich and abundant life.
- who **calms our troubled nightmares**.
- who invites us to **dream hopeful and helpful dreams**.

People here in this congregation have heard me say this repeatedly. Any time I am preaching away up here, I've got it figured that about every third person has some sort of a major trauma going on in their lives. Everybody looks fine on the outside, but inside they are being ripped apart by some hurt or worry. Nobody is immune. It's just a matter of **whose turn it is this week**. **And what are you going to do about it**. **Will you let God help you?** **Will you let God's people** – often broken, limping or hurting themselves – **will you let them help you?**

**Jacob** is a living example of the people of God:

- Sometimes believing, sometimes doubting,
- Sometimes turning to God, sometimes running from God,
- Sometimes trusting God, sometimes trying to be God themselves,
- Sometimes honest, sometimes lying,
- Sometimes grateful to God, sometimes thankless,
- Sometimes needing help, sometimes able to help someone else.

Does this **sound like you**? Does this sound like the Christian church, our church? Does it sound like the kind of people **God wants to, longs to, will help**? Jacob is in the Bible. These are God's people. You are God's people too.

**Dicky Reed**. He was my **step-grandfather Asa's grandson**. Dicky's own parents had given up on him. Grandma Dina and Grandpa Asa Reed took Dicky in and raised him as their own son. Dicky was older than me, but I remember him and his story. He was full of mischief from the start. As he grew older there was bigger trouble. He drank, got into car wrecks, spent time in jail, accumulated unpaid bills and caused my grandparents constant worry and grief. My father, by then out of the home and raising a family of his own, resented Dicky for causing so much trouble for Grandma Reed. Dad thought that Dicky cared only for

himself and took constant advantage of Grandma Reed's love for him. Grandma gave Dicky lots of second chances and there was no end to her heartache and disappointment. Finally Dicky went into the navy, submarines. He got married. His life turned around. But he was far from home, family and Grandma Reed.

Grandma Reed was on her deathbed in the hospital. Everyone was called home. Mom and Dad raced to drive back from Arizona. Dicky was granted leave to come home from Hawaii. Grandma Reed hung on - days and days beyond what the doctor predicted she could survive. Finally Dad and Dicky arrived home the same day. Grandma was no longer responsive, but together they went in and said their goodbyes. That day she **slipped away home with Jesus**.

Maybe there has been someone in your life like Grandma Reed. Someone who wouldn't give up on you. Thanks be to God. Maybe there is someone like Jesus in your life too. Jesus, who won't give up on you. Jesus. **God's family** is full of **sinners, hypocrites**, who are **also beloved children of God**. That means that there's **room for you and me too**. Jesus, **lived, died, came back** and **is here** for **you and me too**. I believe it. **Jesus, for you and me too**. Thanks be to God. Amen.