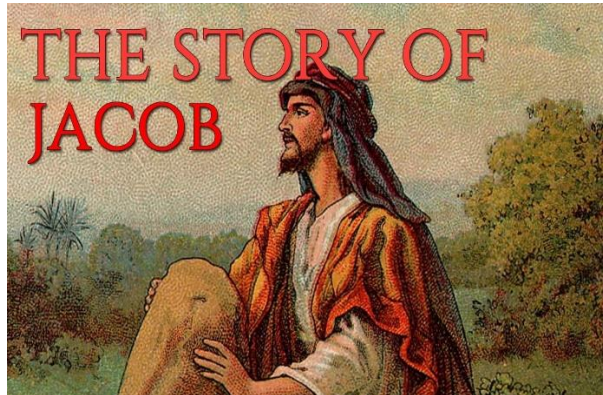


**NINTH SUNDAY  
AFTER PENTECOST  
JULY 30, 2023**



**ST. JOHN UNITED  
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: Let us call on our God and give thanks.

Let hearts rejoice as we sing God's praise.

**MANY: Glory be to God in whose covenant we find life.**

**Let all the people tell of God's wonderful works.**

ONE: Let us open ourselves continually to God's presence.

Let us seek the strength that God alone provides.

**MANY: Surely the Spirit helps us in our weakness.**

**The Spirit searches our hearts and enlarges God?**

ONE: Who can separate us from the love of God?

Will hardship, distress, or peril overcome us?

**MANY: Nothing can separate us from God's love.**

**We can face all things, knowing God's care.**

**\*INVOCATION:** Meet us here, holy God, to search our hearts and strengthen our spirits. Plant your Word among us that it may spring up in nurturing, inviting ways for the sake of all your creatures. May we find in these moments of worship the assurance we need to live triumphantly in the face of loss, discouragement, and suffering. Lead us, by the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, to trust you and your will for us. We believe that whatever happens, you can bring some good from it. Show us, O God, the good you intend. Amen.

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION:** We who profess our faith are challenged to be honest about our doubts. Our pretense of concern for others is tainted by our self-interest. Our great plans are compromised by little deceits. God judges as well as upholds.

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

**You know us, God, better than we know ourselves. You know the ways we scheme and manipulate for our own advantage. You are aware of how often our deeds fail to match the faith we claim. Help us to face ourselves with**

**honesty. Give us the will and courage to change our ways. We give thanks for Christ's intercession for us. We rejoice as the Spirit gives voice to all we cannot express. Save us, O God, that our lives might give expression to your reign. Amen.**

**\*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:** Praise our God who forgives and restores. Give thanks for the inheritance that is ours in Christ Jesus. We have received a pearl of great value, a treasure underserved, a pardon unmerited. Nothing can separate us from the love of God – not death or life, not angels or rulers, not things present or things to come, not heights or depths; no earthly power or anything in all creation can take away God's abiding concern and care for each one of us. Praise God!

**\*GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat two more times.) (end) One God always here. One God always here.**

**SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Old Testament Genesis 29:15-**

28<sup>15</sup> Laban said to Jacob, "You shouldn't have to work for free just because you are my relative. Tell me what you would like to be paid."

<sup>16</sup> Now Laban had two daughters: the older was named Leah and the younger Rachel. <sup>17</sup> Leah had delicate eyes, but Rachel had a beautiful figure and was good-looking. <sup>18</sup> Jacob

loved Rachel and said, "I will work for you for seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter."

<sup>19</sup> Laban said, "I'd rather give her to you than to another man. Stay with me."

<sup>20</sup> Jacob worked for Rachel for seven years, but it seemed like a few days because he loved her. <sup>21</sup> Jacob said to Laban, "The time has come. Give me my wife so that I may sleep with her." <sup>22</sup> So Laban invited all the people of that place and prepared a banquet. <sup>23</sup> However, in the evening, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he slept with her. <sup>24</sup> Laban had given his servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her servant. <sup>25</sup> In the morning, there she was—Leah! Jacob said to Laban, "What have you done to me? Didn't I work for you to have Rachel? Why did you betray me?"

<sup>26</sup> Laban said, "Where we live, we don't give the younger woman before the oldest. <sup>27</sup> Complete the celebratory week with this woman. Then I will give you this other woman too for your work, if you work for me seven more years." <sup>28</sup> So that is what Jacob did. He completed the celebratory week with this woman, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife.

**EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 8:26-39**

<sup>26</sup> In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. <sup>27</sup> The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God's will. <sup>28</sup> We know that God works all things together for good for the ones

who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.<sup>29</sup> We know this because God knew them in advance, and he decided in advance that they would be conformed to the image of his Son. That way his Son would be the first of many brothers and sisters.<sup>30</sup> Those who God decided in advance would be conformed to his Son, he also called. Those whom he called, he also made righteous. Those whom he made righteous, he also glorified.

<sup>31</sup> So what are we going to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup> He didn't spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. Won't he also freely give us all things with him?

<sup>33</sup> Who will bring a charge against God's elect people? It is God who acquits them. <sup>34</sup> Who is going to convict them? It is Christ Jesus who died, even more, who was raised, and who also is at God's right side. It is Christ Jesus who also pleads our case for us.

<sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from Christ's love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written,

*We are being put to death all day long for your sake.*

*We are treated like sheep for slaughter.*

<sup>37</sup> But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us. <sup>38</sup> I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers <sup>39</sup> or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.

**MESSAGE: "The trickster meets a trickster"**

Today's First Testament reading is among those texts that remind us just how strange the world of the Bible is. Genesis 29:15-28, with its allusions to polygamy and servitude for wives, sounds almost quaint to modern Western ears. Even in the day when this story was told, many of these customs were antiquated. For the writer and the early readers, these were events of a time long ago and far away. The practice described here without any criticism at all is expressly prohibited in Leviticus 18:18: to marry two sisters, either at the same time or successively, constitutes incest (from the later priestly legislation). Part of the attraction of the story, even for the ancient readers, lay in its strangeness. As we say, "it makes for a good story."

Despite the alien features of the story, we can quickly find ourselves identifying with the characters, suspending our own sense of proper social and family relationships and living in the narrative's world for a while.

Although it can be seen as a self-contained story, it's useful to remember the broader context in this saga of Jacob. Today's event took place in Laban's land, the region in upper Mesopotamia where Abraham had originated and where he sent for Rebekah, Jacob's mother. By the way, Laban is Rebekah's brother.

Jacob was in Laban's land because he had fled from the wrath of his brother, Esau. Jacob had tricked Esau out of his birthright and cheated him out of his "oldest son's" blessing.

Jacob comes to Laban homeless and poor. Laban takes him "under his wing." Jacob becomes not a servant nor

hired hand because he is a relative. To pay Jacob for his work on Laban's land, he offers his daughter and tricks Jacob into marrying both of Laban's daughters. *(Spoiler Alert. Later Jacob will trick Laban out of some of his livestock.)*

It is hard-pressed to find a moral in this text because none is explicit. The men are having "fun" with each other with seemingly no bad consequences. The wives of Jacob bring along their maids and in time Jacob has 12 sons by these women which become the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Good for Jacob and Laban. They get rich while they treat the women like livestock, possessions, property. Jacob loves Rachel more than Leah. The women hate each other. More suffering. Although the narrator of this story does not moralize on the issues at all, the story can be the occasion for reflection on the question of status, poverty, and wealth.

Along with their husband, these women become the parents of the people of Israel. I guess that's the "good" consequences of all this cheating and deceiving. The story reads like a history lesson.

So, what should we readers make of Jacob? God is nowhere to be found in these passages. Will God have a part in the rest of Jacob's saga? We'll have to wait ad see. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:**

Hearer of prayers. Giver of wisdom. Advocate of God's people, we give thanks for every human leader who has sought and received your gifts, who has known and served

you. We thank you for patriarchs and matriarchs, that you are the God of Sarah as well as of Abraham, of Rebekah as well as of Isaac, of Rachel as well as Jacob. You make yourself known in days of pilgrimage as in years of exile and in periods of settlement. There is no place on earth where you cannot be worshiped and called upon, by whatever name or title, in any language, by people of many faults and faiths and differing customs. You deserve the thanksgiving of everyone everywhere, for you are God of all, responsive, generous, and compassionate.

Hear your people as we pray for your church that it may graciously offer our sacraments with generosity, that those who come to you may never be hungry and those who believe in you may never be thirsty or work again for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life.

To your tender mercies and healing care we commend all who suffer, all who are sick, all who are hurting physically or mentally. Soothe and comfort all the troubled, calm the anxious, cool the fevered, strengthen the weak. Grant wisdom and carefulness to all surgeons, physicians, nurses, nursing assistants, and medical technicians that our hospitals and clinics may bring new health to many. Bless all pastors and chaplains who minister to the dying that their final days may be trustful and expectant of your mercy.

We keep in our prayers today all those suffering in our excessive heat hitting our world this week. May they find relief in cooling stations, air conditioning, neighbors and family who can help.

To you, our God, Parent, Brother, Sister, and Holy Spirit,  
Be given all the glory, time without end, as we pray together  
...

**LORD'S PRAYER:**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in  
heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us  
our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into  
temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the  
kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:** We gather an offering, not so  
much to support an institution as to follow our passion to  
share the good news of the realm of God with one another  
and with many who have never heard it. Amid an  
atmosphere of deceit and distrust in the world, where  
community is so seldom realized in our day, we aspire to  
discover and live God's will for us. Let us give generosity.

**\*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

**The gift of your realm is precious to us, O God. It is worth  
our greatest efforts and our caring sacrifice. As we search  
for the best in life, we also want to share our faith  
discoveries with friends and neighbors. We do that  
personally and with our giving. May our outreach  
proclaim to all that nothing can separate us from your  
love. We give you thanks that you have entrusted to us all  
that we are privileged to share. Amen.**

**\*COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

ONE: God remembers the covenant made with humanity.

May we remember our part of that covenant.

**MANY: We will praise our God wherever we go.**

**We will tell of God's wonderful works.**

ONE: God brings good from the worst of circumstances.

Those who trust God live with confidence.

**MANY: We believe nothing can separate us from God's  
love. In Christ, we are assured of God's care.**

ONE: We are invited to make God's realm our first priority.  
Living as God intends is life's greatest fulfillment.

**Many: May our faith grow strong by knowing God cares  
for us. We treasure God's realm in our midst.**

Amen. Amen.

**PRAYER LIST:**