

Bible Study
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 10, Year A
July 16, 2017

[RCL:] **Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9,18-23**

Genesis 25:19-34

The narrator of this passage describes Jacob's success over his brother Esau, and in doing so we learn something about God. We learn that Jacob, the younger brother, even from the womb will be served by his older brother. We hear of Esau's displays of masculinity and skills from birth in a variety of trades, while we are only told that Jacob is a quiet man. As the older brother and a successful man, Esau should be the favored choice for God's future people, and yet it is Jacob whom God chooses. Jacob receives his brother's birthright, setting him on the path that will lead to his new name, Israel, and his heritage as the father of the twelve tribes. In this passage, we see a God who favors the weaker brother, an individual of lower stature, who is not supposed to be destined to accomplish great deeds. This story presents us with a God who "casts down the mighty and lifts the lowly," who stands up for the weak and leads them to acts beyond imagination.

- I wonder who the weak and lowly are in your community. How are you and your community meeting their needs?
- I wonder who you are in this story today. Do you relate more to Jacob or Esau in the present moment? Why?

Psalm 119:105-112

Psalm 119, written after the Exile, emphasizes the importance of God's word in living a faithful life, especially in times of need and strife. From verse 112, we hear that the word of God is not simply something to be heard or read, but something to be applied to the heart, inwardly digested and lived. The beauty of the Psalms is their ability to meet us where we are. This psalmist prays in full confidence of God's support, all the while acknowledging the difficulty in doing so. As 21st-century readers of the Psalms, we can be comforted by the timelessness of God's guidance. This psalm, prayed thousands of years ago to bring comfort to this people still brings comfort and hope to those who can still feel troubled and trapped.

- I wonder in what ways has Scripture been a comfort to you in times of trouble.
- Do you have any portion of Scripture memorized and "applied to your heart"? If so, how did you choose it?

Romans 8:1-11

The juxtaposition of flesh and spirit is repeated over and over again in this passage. It can be easy in our world to attend services on a Sunday morning and switch gears back into our secular lives as we drive out of the parking lot. However, we are called to live into the spirit of God that dwells in us. As humans we are fleshy creatures; our bodies crave food, we grieve over the loss

of loved ones, and we don't have to watch news channels very long to see the weaknesses of governments and societies to protect the weak. These human parts of our lives are not to be turned off or altogether rejected, but as followers of Christ, we are called to live with a spirit of hope as well. It is this spirit, working through us, that will help us create a better world for all those who inhabit it.

- I wonder how you get ready to listen to the spirit of God.
- I wonder what distracts you from living in the spirit. What might keep you focused?

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

It is easy to be distracted from living a deep spiritual life. It can be easy to forget how to get ready to come close to the holy, how to open ourselves to the voice of the Good Shepherd. This parable gives imagery to the importance of hearing and understanding God. When this happens our minds can be like good soil, ready for growth and maturity. But often, we find ourselves among thorns, scorched by the sun, or a bird's snack. While the goal is to be good soil, to always understand and respond to God, it is nearly impossible to accomplish this all the time. We are not just one of these seeds, but we are all of these seeds at one time or another. Growing in faith requires practice; sometimes we find ourselves in the good soil and sometimes we find difficulty and questions, but the key is to keep practicing. God is always present and waiting to greet us, we must continually practice being good soil, knowing that even when we fall among the thorns God will be there to help us try again.

- I wonder which seed you are today.
- I wonder if you have found the good soil.
- I wonder what you hope to grow into.

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