

SCRIPTURE READING FOR OCTOBER 3, 2021 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Genesis 27:1-4, 15-23; 32:22-32

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

27¹ When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.” ² He said, “See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. ³ Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. ⁴ Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die.” ...

¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; ¹⁶ and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

¹⁸ So he went in to his father, and said, “My father”; and he said, “Here I am; who are you, my son?” ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.” ²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the Lord your God granted me success.” ²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.” ²² So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” ²³ He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.

32²² *The same night* [Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. ²⁴ Jacob was left alone; and a MAN wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” ²⁷ So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Genesis – the first book of the Hebrew Bible – tells the story of the people of God. From Abraham and Sarah (and Hagar) we move to the next generation Isaac (and Ishmael). Isaac is not an old man, feeble and nearly blind. He seems unimportant in the larger story, in contrast to his parents, wife and sons. Why is he included in the story when he’s so unexceptional. It’s a reminder to us that doing the daily tasks of life for and with other people is a God-given task that makes life possible. When we focus only on the exceptional we can get ahead of our selves.

Isaac has two sons, one of whom Jacob, is a scoundrel. God surprisingly uses such a schemer as a charter member of the community of faith. Although the second-born, working in cahoots with his mother he outwits his father and cheats his brother out of the family blessing and inheritance. Jacob asks for a blessing, maybe dreaming of security, land, more children, but what he gets is a new identity. By chapter 32 Jacob has had to flee empty-handed from home for his life, but has created a fortune and now must face the brother he stuck-it-to years earlier. Terrified, he prays and hides. Then “on the way to his brother whom he wants to appease, Jacob must deal with his God to whom he has made intercession.” (w.

Brueggemann) (adapted from the introduction to the Psalms in *The Message*)

Jacob:: from Hebrew יַעֲקֹב (Ya‘qob), comes either from the Hebrew root עָקַב ‘qab meaning “to follow, to be behind” but also “to supplant, circumvent, assail, overreach”, or from the word for “heel”, עָקֵב ‘aqeb. It was given when and Jacob held Esau’s heel as they were born. It also can mean trickster, supplanter, or over-reacher. Genesis 25:19-28

said, “Jacob.”²⁸ Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but **Israel**, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.”²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him.³⁰ So Jacob called the place **Peniel**, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.”³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in this text?
- The first story points to the strange new world into which the Bible invites us where there is great power in words that are spoken, symbolic actions and blessings. What do you find strange in this story of Jacob, Esau and how God forms a people from them?
- Nobody wants to live an unblessed life. Does God reward Jacob for his sneakiness and trickery? Does Jacob force God’s hand? Or was this always God’s plan – to act through Jacob instead of the expected older brother Esau?
- Jacob faces God and seems to be God’s equal in power, wrestling the angel all night long to a draw. But he is crippled in the encounter, transformed forever, given a new name. When, how have you wrestled with God in a similar way seeking blessing, understanding, or power in your weakness?
- The story tells of power in weakness and weakness in power. It also tells of intrigue and deception that lead to blessing and new identity. Walter Brueggemann says, this story is “ a memory of how faith moves in the rawness of experience.” What do you hear this story saying about who and how God is, and who we are and how we relate to God and one another?
- What invitation do you heard the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The same night:: our story transpires on the night that Jacob is on his way back home, after having lived for years abroad. Jacob is terrified that his brother, who he wronged many years earlier, cheating him of his birthright, will seek his revenge against his scoundrel brother. Being the trickster that he is, Jacob sends all his belongings, servants, and family before him....seeking to elicit Esau’s mercy before he comes in person before his brother.

A MAN:: an angel. Is it an angel, or is it God who actually wrestles with Jacob?

Israel:: the Hebrew name יִשְׂרָאֵל (Yisra'el) meaning "God contends", (fights, struggles, protects, rules, preserves or protects) from the roots שָׂרָה (sarah) meaning "to contend, to fight, to wrestle" and אֱל (‘el) meaning "God". The exact meaning is unclear. Historically we’ve believed it to mean (he/she who contends with God.) Increasingly modern scholars believe it means more that God is the one who contends, or rules. In the Old Testament, Israel (who was formerly named Jacob; see Genesis 32:28) wrestles with an angel. The ancient and modern states of Israel took their names from him.

Peniel:: Hebrew: פְּנוֹיָאֵל from (1) the verb פָּנָה (pana), to turn, and (2) the word אֱל (‘el), God. It means “Face of God” and describes as a place not far from Succoth, on the east of the Jordan River and south of the river Jabbok in present-day Jordan.