

September 19, 2010 “Why Only Genesis Today?”
Genesis 12:1-4; Genesis 28:10-22

Narrative Lectionary introduction:

“We read the Bible to find out who we are.” Every story has a claim on you – promise or demand. Every Bible story is a family story b/c it’s your story. (Prof. of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, Rolf Jacobson)

Learning the practice of seeing yourself in the Bible:

1. Where do I find myself in the story?
2. Where is God?
3. Where/What is the claim?

Usually on a Sunday we read four Scripture texts – Old Testament reading, a Psalm, an Epistle (or letter), and a Gospel reading. These texts are based on a 3-year lectionary cycle – every 3 years we rotate through the same scripture readings, so there are some Biblical stories, etc. that we don’t touch in this lectionary cycle. The other thing that happens with this is that we jump all over the chronological timeline of our Biblical story, so it can be hard to understand what happened when and who appeared first. From today through the end of the Easter season (6/12), we will be following the Biblical story in a narrative lectionary beginning w/the readings that you heard today. Some Sundays we may only read one Scripture text while other Sundays w may borrow a second Scripture reading from our usual lectionary. The point is to discover those passages that tell the story of God and help us to learn the practice of seeing ourselves in this story.

Our first Genesis reading is a quick glimpse of Abraham and Sarah, which is the story of promises and blessings. To this couple, God promises three things: a people, a land, and a blessing to all families (blessed to be a blessing). A blessing is something that gives purpose and meaning, but most of all, a blessing is to be with God. In the book of Genesis, the promises of God are endangered by none other than human sin; yet despite that, God is more than able to fulfill God’s promises.

In Genesis 28 we meet Jacob looking for a place to sleep in the desert and the best he can do is to find a rock to use as a pillow. And on that spot he dreams. And in that dream, God finds him. Whereas Abram fled to the Promised Land for life, Jacob flees for his life by leaving the Promised Land! Abram received the promise from God when he came to the land, and funny enough, Jacob receives the same promise when he's about to leave that Promised Land!

How in the world did Jacob get into this mess where he needed to flee the Promised Land and his family? (It doesn't sound like much of a blessing!)

Some of you may recall the story of how Jacob got into this mess. Jacob, with the help of his mother, Rebekah, tricks his father, Isaac, into thinking he's his brother, Esau, in order to receive the blessing! What trickery! So, fearing for Jacob's life after the deception is discovered, Jacob's mother directs him to flee to the land of Haran, where her brother, Laban, resides; hoping that Esau's anger will end. He (Jacob) is instructed by his father on who to look for as a wife so that Jacob can continue the blessing given to Abraham (Gen. 28:4).

And it is at this point in the story that we find Jacob, lying in the desert and using a rock as a pillow. His story continues on and I invite you to read it further in the book of Genesis, but let's stop here and think about what we can learn about God's claim on us through this story of Jacob.

Jacob is fleeing and looking for safety; he's not seeking God, but that's where God meets him. God not only finds him, God promises to be with him wherever he goes. And this is Jacob, who stole his brother's blessing!

What is God's claim? God uses flawed people to continue and fulfill the promises of God – what a family we are a part of!

Martin Luther wrote that God meets us in the low places (not the high places). God meets us, as he did Jacob, where we find ourselves — in the hard places of anger, hurt, fear, loss, and anxiety. And, in those places, God continues to remind us of the blessings and promises that God has for us.

Sometimes life does not feel like a blessing. I'm sure that it didn't for Jacob when he found himself fleeing the place and the people that he knew thinking about what he had done. Things have a tendency to get pretty mixed up and yet God can still work through them. The promise and blessing extended to Jacob wasn't dependent upon whether Jacob deserved it or not, and you receiving God's promise isn't based on whether you deserve it or not. It is balanced directly and securely on the grace of God.

In a few moments we will join together in a meal that is given to us not because we deserve it, but because it is a continuation of the story of God through Jesus Christ in God's grace, given to us as a foretaste of the feast to come through God's blessings and promises that began long ago in our family story book that we call The Bible.

We join together in this place knowing that even though we didn't read a book of the Bible labeled as the gospel reading this morning, we know that the gospel, the good news is right here among us. The good news, as mixed up as it seems, comes to us in the symbol of suffering that we hang center-stage in our worship space – the cross – reminding us that again and again God comes to us and meets us in our suffering. The cross is our announcement of where God is and that it is God who finds us.

God's promise to Jacob is also a promise given to you: "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you will go."

Helpful Resources

- "Finding Ourselves in God's Story" Lecture by Prof. Rolf Jacobson of Luther Seminary
- Achtemeier, Elizabeth article on Genesis 28 in *The Lectionary Commentary* series