

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5-3-21



Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, May 4 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for God's Kingdom. Pray that it spreads and for guidance and opportunities to contribute to the growth of God's Kingdom in our world. Give thanks in those moments when you see the growth happening.

Leaving is not always easy, especially when it is to go where God wants you to go. We get comfortable with our life and who we are. Then God says, "I've got more for you. I have a vision for you. I want you to go and be the person I intended for you to be."

One of the best examples of one who resisted that leaving for God is Jacob in the Book of Genesis. Jacob was the younger of twins. His brother, Esau, was born first, but as Esau emerged from his mother's womb, Jacob's hand was clinging to his heel. It was as though Jacob were trying to pull Esau back in, so that he could be born first. You see, the birthright was very important in biblical times. The first-born, through the birthright, would be perceived as the head of the family and everyone else was expected to follow the leading of the oldest son. The birthright also related to the inheritance of the father. The first-born, as holder of the birthright, would receive two-thirds of the father's estate. The other sons would then divide the remaining third. Though infants, Jacob seemed to know this and tried to be the first one out of the womb so that he would get the birthright, but he was unsuccessful. As a result, he was given the name Jacob, which means "he grasps the heel" but figuratively means "he deceives." Imagine growing up with that as your name.

Jacob lived up to his name, however, or perhaps became who he was because of his name. When Esau came home after hunting one time, tired and famished, Jacob met him with a big pot of red stew. Esau (whose name, by the way, mean "red") wanted the stew, but Jacob said he would only give it to Esau if Esau would sell him the birthright, meaning the inheritance. Esau, who clearly didn't respect the birthright and what it represented, agreed and gave up his inheritance for a good meal. Jacob followed that up by putting goat skins on his arms (Esau was very hairy) and deceived his father, who was blind by now, so that he gave Jacob the family

blessing too. Good for Jacob, or so he thought, until Esau came after Jacob with murder on his mind, and Jacob had to flee to the land of his uncle Laban

On the way, Jacob had a dream where God promised to give him the land that God had promised to his grandfather, Abraham, as well as keeping the promise made to Abraham to make him the father of a great nation. Jacob was moved by that dream and made a commitment that the Lord would be his God. Good words, but Jacob was still too much tied to his name and his deceitful ways to leave them behind.

Uncle Laban had two daughters and Jacob immediately fell in love with the younger one called Rachel (which means “ewe’s eyes”—appropriate for the daughter of a man who owned herds of sheep). Laban, who was also a bit of a trickster, made Jacob work for seven years to marry Rachel. But at the wedding, when Jacob lifted the veil, he discovered Laban had married him to the older daughter Leah (which means “cow’s eyes”—Laban also raised cattle). When Jacob protested, Laban said it wasn’t right for the younger daughter to marry before the elder, but if Jacob worked seven more years, then he could also marry Rachel. So, he did. And after years of overseeing the herds, Jacob with his two wives, stayed around to continue that work. But he got Laban to agree to give him the sheep that had blemishes so that Laban would have only unblemished sheep. All well and good, except Jacob started breeding the unblemished sheep with the blemished so that he got all the sheep and Laban got none. That didn’t go over so well with Laban, so Jacob, his wives and children, and his flocks had to flee from his father-in-law. Now Jacob had ruined his relationship with pretty much all of his extended family.

Finally, Jacob began to see that this was not the what following God was all about. Calling on God for protection, he turned first to Laban and was able to make a covenant with him. Laban let him go with the promise that Jacob would look after his daughters. Jacob then decided that he needed to also heal the relationship with Esau, so he returned to meet his brother. The night before he would cross the river to enter Esau’s lands, Jacob had a dream in which he wrestled with a powerful man who dislocated Jacob’s hip. Jacob hung on to the man and insisted he would not release him until he had received a blessing. The man, as a blessing, gave him a new name. When he awoke, Jacob realized it had not been a dream but a vision, that the man he had wrestled was God, and the blessing was real. Jacob crossed the river, met Esau, and was able to reconcile with him. Jacob became a different person, seeking to serve the Lord and to raise his family with values that came from God. He finally left his old identity of “he deceives” behind and claimed the blessing of that new identity, the name Israel, which means “wrestles with God.” If you think about the history of the nation of Israel—Jacob’s descendants—it has very much been one of wrestling with God. They have often had to struggle to find God’s will for them, but their existence today is a testimony to God’s protection. Israel has not always been “blessed to be a blessing” to others as God has called upon them to be, but they have regularly reached significant times when they needed to leave their past behind and to go to the place God has called them, to be the people of God.

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey