

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 Sermon: The Blessings We Grab vs. the Blessings God Gives
 Scripture: Genesis 27:1-4,15-23 & 28:10-17
 Rev. Steve Filyk
 November 16, 2025
 Opener: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"
 Choruses: This is Amazing Grace, Cornerstone
 Hymn after Sermon: "Be Still, My Soul"
 Closer: "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

Those who have spent any time with preschoolers
 Will know that they they go through this season
 Of collecting things they find outdoors.

For a number of years our kids'
 Jacket pockets were always stuffed full of rocks,
 Or seashells, or horse chestnuts
 (without the spikey husks).

There also was this a later stage
 where they started collecting pieces of wood
 that they thought would be good walking sticks.

We never really stop collecting.

As adults the objects change—money, status, control—
 but the posture is the same: hands reaching, grasping,
 trying to secure a future for ourselves.

It is exactly this sort of grasping
 That sits at the heart of today's Bible story.

PAUSE

Today we are continuing our journey through Genesis.
 Last Sunday, Remembrance Sunday,
 We heard about the binding of Isaac

Where God tested Abraham's loyalty
 And Abraham learned that God was really first in his life.

Abraham is now mature in his relationship with God.
 And we can see why God has chosen to work through him
 To bless the world.

The challenge, however, is that this blessing
 will be worked out among his offspring.
 As you all know family wealth and family businesses
 doesn't usually survive through the third generation.
 So how will God's plan continue?

We see this play out today.

We meet Jacob and his twin brother Esau
 The grandchildren of Abraham.

The two could not be more different:
 Esau, Isaac's favourite, is a rugged hunter while
 Jacob, Rebekah's favourite, stays close to camp.

Because Esau is the older twin,
 He is expected to become the executor of Isaac's estate
 and de facto head of the family.

But Jacob and their mother Rebekah don't like this idea.
 They don't want to be dependent on Esau's favor.
 So when Isaac decides it is time to offer Esau his blessing,
 and transfer "leadership of the clan" to Esau,
 Jacob and his mom plot to steal it away from him.
 (see notes from Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible p.64)

Today's reading describes their deception.
 Jacob and his mom do their best to grab what they can
 To ensure a better future for themselves.

But while Jacob ends up receiving that irrevocable blessing of his father,
Esau won't accept the treachery of his brother.
Esau plans to kill Jacob as soon as their father has died.

Jacob and his mom's plan to seize their future backfires
And Jacob is forced to leave home.
Isaac is persuaded to send Jacob to relatives
To find a suitable wife among family
But the real reason is to save him from his brother's wrath.

Many years ago Abraham had journey from Haran
to the place God had promised to him.
Now his grandson Jacob is on the reverse journey
And it seems like God's plans are unravelling...

Jacob covers a whole lot of miles the first day of his journey.
He only settles down when it is too dark to travel.
Interestingly, he is at the very same place
Where his grandfather had previously built an altar,
But Jacob doesn't know this,
and he doesn't know his grandfather's god.

Jacob is alone.
He is without travel companions or escorts.
He had thought he was guaranteeing his future,
But now he is a fugitive outside of the protection of family
And exposed to all the elements.

As he tries to keep warm in the darkness
we can imagine how the weight of everything he's done
and everything he fears is pressing in on him.
He is a man who has run out of plans,
out of protection, and out of himself.

But it is there, in that emptiness, that God meets him.
In his sleep he sees "a stairway resting on the earth,
with its top reaching to heaven,

and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."

Ancient people built stepped towers—ziggurats—
as imagined bridges between earth and heaven.
Jacob sees something like that in his dream,
only this one is not built by human hands.
(See Mark, J. J. (2022, October 13). Ziggurat. Retrieved November 14, 2025,
from World History Encyclopedia website:
<https://www.worldhistory.org/ziggurat/>)

Jacob saw a stairway and at the top of it he saw the Lord,
Who introduced himself to Jacob:

"I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac."
Note that earlier in the story
when Isaac asked the masquerading Jacob
About how he found success in his hunt so quickly,
Jacob replied: "The Lord YOUR God gave me success." (Genesis 27:20)

Jacob doesn't seem to know the God of his fathers.
But here God introduces himself.

Then God repeats to him the same promises that God had made to
Abraham when he called him to leave Haran:
Promises of land, descendants, and blessing.

Even though Jacob is retreating back to Haran,
God affirms that these promises are with him.
And then God adds three more promises—
promises of presence, protection, and a return home:

"I am with you
and will watch over you wherever you go,
and I will bring you back to this land."

Imagine what this encounter must have been like.

For the first time in his life,
 Jacob discovers that the God he has only ever heard about
 is now the God who comes looking for him.
 This God affirms that Jacob
 Will be the recipient of ancient promises
 And be given new ones.
 For someone who is a fugitive
 Whose scheming had undermined his own future,
 This vision must have been incredibly encouraging.

The God who meets him,
 Doesn't review his shameful past
 But describes a future filled with blessing.

As he continues on his journey to Haran
 He will know that God will be with him,
 And that he is not dependent on his own resources.
 He has witnessed with his own eyes
 that heaven and earth are connected.
 (see Bruce Walke Genesis 243-246)

This is to me, a good news story.
 It reminds us that our place in God's greater story
 Isn't something we earn but is received as a gift.

The Jacob we meet in today's story
 Has no gifts of faith or character.
 He is an unsympathetic actor
 Who doesn't deserve anything.

And his story gives us permission to be honest about our own—
 About our own selfishness,
 about the parts we wish we could outrun,
 about the ways we've grasped instead of trusted.

And into lives like our, God still comes close.

Jacob's story gives us hope about our own lives
 About it gives us hope about our descendants.
 I don't know why that Jacob didn't know
 the God of his father or grandfather.
 Maybe Isaac was too busy with tending his business
 And never took the time to tell him the stories
 About his or his father's journey with the Lord.

But the good news is that despite Isaac's failures
 God chases after his Jacob.

For the sake of that promise God has made with Abraham,
 God introduces himself to Jacob,
 God speaks of his promises to him.

And Jacob will one day learn that among all the earth's blessings
 God's blessings, are the ones worth fighting for
 (you'll need to read ahead in Genesis to learn about this).

Do you feel your history excludes you from God's blessings?
 Because of Jesus you are like Jacob,
 one of Abraham's favored spiritual descendants.

Do you worry about children and grandchildren,
 Spending all your energy chasing after the blessings of the earth
 Rather than the one who has provided them?

Know that for the sake of Christ
 And for the sake of the prayers, we offer in his name,
 God will make himself known among our offspring
 So like Jacob they can grab hold of what is most important.

May we, like Jacob, learn to loosen our grip
 on the blessings we try to seize—
 and open our hands to the ones God longs to give.

Amen and amen.