

Friday, July 24

Reading: Genesis 29:17 *"Now Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was graceful and beautiful"*

Thought: Before my cataract surgery, I was extremely short-sighted, and so I know what it is like to have weak eyes. I am a very visual person and experience so much of the Bible in a visual way and when I read the stories in Genesis it is almost as if I am watching a movie instead of reading a book. The description of the characters makes them come to life. In my mind's eye I see Leah squinting and wrinkling up her face in a vain effort to see. I imagine Leah would often stumble or even fall because she couldn't see what was in front of her. No wonder Jacob was drawn to Rachel. Then again, I wonder if there is a less literal meaning in this description of Leah. Perhaps Leah was not able to "see" the message? What do you experience when you read this Bible verse? This story?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – give me eyes to see all that I am called to realize and understand.

Saturday, July 25

Reading: Psalm 139:1-2, 23-24 *O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up, you discern my thoughts from far away...Search me, O God and know my heart, test me, and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."*

Thought: God knows us intimately; God hears our thoughts as no human can. This can be a scary thing because so many of our thoughts may be negative and unChrist-like. Yet this reading from the Psalms is not one of judgement and as such is not a source of fear. It is a true and valid request and one that is applicable to all of us. If we truly want to be like Jesus, we need to know where we are wrong and seek redirection. Remember, God answers all prayers and forgives all sin, even those sinful thoughts not acted on. Are you worried about God knowing everything about you? Are you willing to give up even the sinful thoughts you have?

Prayer: All-knowing God – search my innermost thoughts, root out, and forgive those thoughts which are less than perfect and lead me to your path.

Sunday July 26

Reading: Wisdom of Solomon 12:17-18 *"Although you (God) are sovereign in strength, you judge fairly and with great forbearance you govern us, for you have power to act whenever you choose."*

Thought: Yesterday we contemplated how God knows – not just our actions, but even our innermost thoughts. Today we are reading how God rules over us with patience and restraint. Well, what a blessing that is! Here we are, in our ordinary, human, sinful state, being judged by a God who is so powerful that He can do whatever He wants with us. Truly – we are blessed that God governs with forbearance. Are you amazed that God has such power and yet cares for you so deeply? Do you feel blessed by the way God sees and judges you?

Prayer: Friend Jesus – help me to be like you in thought, word, and deed. I willingly accept the judgement of my sins and rest in God's patience and forgiveness.

Monday, July 27

Reading: Isaiah 44:6 *“Thus says the Lord, the ruler of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and the last, besides me there is no god.”*

Thought: This verse is often quoted using the Greek words alpha and omega, which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. We might also say that God is the be-all and end-all, which is a phrase that designates a thing that is much more important than all other things, the ultimate part of something. There is nothing more important than God and I find it interesting that in this verse, God is identified by the prophet as not only our ruler and redeemer, but that God goes even further, declaring to be the beginning, the end and the one and only God. All I can say to that is...“Wow!” What is your reaction? What does the first and the last mean to you?

Prayer: Holy God – you are my first and last and my in-between. There is nothing else like you and I worship and adore you.

Tuesday, July 28

Reading: Psalm 86:11 *“Teach me your way, O God, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.”*

Thought: We at Southwood United are in a time of transition and change. We have become financially secure and have a new part time minister. It is time to pray for guidance for our church and our individual roles within it as we seek to identify our mission and purpose. What better prayer could we pray than this one from the writer of the Psalms. Oh, that we would hear and heed the teachings of God and walk in the way, the truth, and the light of Jesus. Oh, that we would be united in our selves and in our congregation to revere God’s name and to understand and act as we are called. Are you praying for God’s guidance for your congregation and your role within it? What have you been told?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – call us, teach us, show us, and help us understand the will of the most high for ourselves and our church.

Wednesday, July 29

Reading: Romans 8:28 *We know that all things work together for the good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”*

Thought: Here Paul, the writer of Romans, is not stating a hope or even a belief. He is stating a fact. When we discern God’s purpose, then all things will work together for good. This is as much a fact now as it was thousands of years ago. It can also be a bit of a caution. Not all OUR plans come to fruition. In order for things to work together for good, they must be in accordance with the will of God, for when we are following the will of God, which is when things turn out well. Have you experienced everything falling in place in unusual ways or unexpected circumstances that ultimately turn out better than expected?

Prayer: God – Help me to know your purpose and to find the things that work together for good.

Thursday, July 30

Reading: Matthew 13:33 *“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”*

Thought: Those of us who bake – even usually unsuccessful bakers like me – know yeast is a leavening agent and makes baked goods light and fluffy and delicious. I always marvel (and say a little prayer of thanks) when the mixture of warm water, sugar and dry yeast starts to bubble and work. Here - yeast used as a symbol of growth. You don't need a lot of yeast to make a whole batch of bread soft and light. You don't need a lot of God's kingdom to start a chain reaction of growth and vitality. Having said that, you do need that little bit, or your bread will be flat and tough just as your life will be flat and tough without at least a little bit of God's kingdom. As an aside, when Jesus spoke these words, they would have been understood more fully by women. Just one more example of Jesus speaking to everyone, all ages, and all genders. Are you a baker? Can you feel the kingdom of God bubbling up?

Prayer: Jesus – you are the great teacher. Help me to understand the lessons you teach and the words you speak.

Friday, July 31

Reading: Genesis 28:12 *“And he dreamed there was a stairway set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”*

Thought: My study Bible tells me that the staircase Jacob saw was probably like those found on the side of ziggurat (a type of pyramid). People would walk up the staircase to worship at a shrine placed at the top. My study Bible also tells me that this dream was a sign that God was offering to be the God of Jacob. Remember that at this point Jacob had stolen his brother's birthright and his blessing and had left his father's home to live with his uncle because his brother was thinking of killing him. It must have been a comfort for Jacob to know that the God of his father Isaac was still with him. I think we can all find comfort in the idea that God offers to be our God, rather than demands to be. Do you find this to be a comfort. How do you know that God is still with you?

Prayer: Eternal God – thank you for staying with me, always being there and offering yourself to me.

As an aside, you can tell the era I grew up in because every time I read this verse, I hear Led Zeppelin singing, “And she's climbing a stairway to heaven.” A totally random, useless, thought, but if you think of Led Zeppelin when you read this story, know that you are not alone....