

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

July 19, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

## **Commentary on Genesis 28:10–19a** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Chapter 27 sets the stage for Jacob's dream. In the previous chapter, Jacob with the help of Rebekah, fooled his aging blind father into receiving Issac's blessing. Even though Esau had legally sold his birthright, it was not his to sell until Issac had official given it to him. While the story fulfills the prophecy given to Rebekah, Esau is still set on killing Jacob (Gen. 27:40). To prevent her son's death, Rebekah tells Jacob to leave and go to her relatives in Haran (Southern Turkey north of Syria). Rebekah then goes further and sets Issac against Esau by rejecting the local women Esau had married and convincing Issac to follow his father's plan sending Jacob back to the place where Rebekah was found. On the run from Esau and sent on a mission from Issac, Jacob finds himself at Bethel. Jacob may have conned his brother and fooled his father, but only God chooses who will receive the covenant of Abraham. The vision at Bethel is the assurance of that God has chosen Jacob to receive the covenant. The vision will later affirm Israel (Jacob's name after struggling with God) claim to the covenant and the area around Bethel will become sacred land for it is "the gate of heaven". By associating this "gate of heaven" to a particular place, the stage is set to argue for one Temple through which the blessings of God flow and the repentance through sacrifices are made illustrated by angels ascending (prayers) and descending (blessings).

Genesis 28:16 "Surely the LORD is in this place-- and I did not know it!"

When was the last time you experienced the presence of God?

Was it an eye opening experience like Jacob's dream or a calm assurance?

Some people feel close to God in the quiet places like drinking coffee and watching the sunrise while others are so busy that God wakes them in the middle of the night. Which are you?

Is worship one of those places and times and if not, why?

## **Commentary on Romans 8:12–25** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

For Paul, the flesh does not represent the created nature which God declared good but rather the self centered survival instincts that seek immediate gratification of the individual over the longer term needs of the community. Paul uses the term flesh to refer to all actions which distort the original goodness. The Spirit reveals a better way to act based not on self gratification but on sacrificial love. Like a parent leading a child, the Spirit reveals the destructive nature of our habits and leads us into positive habits and relationships. The term Abba which means "Daddy" is an intimate reference by a child towards their father and is rarely used in religious Jewish writings because of presumption of familiarity. For Paul, however, this familiarity is possible because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which changes our relationship to God from legal covenant to a familial relationship with God as Father. With God as Father, then all of creation is the Father's house. Just as our sinful focus on self gratification distorts our relationship with God and one another, it also distorts our relationship with creation. All of creation suffers and "groans" in pain awaiting the salvation of humanity and the restoration of compassion for both humanity and creation. This suffering began to be relieved when the "first fruits of the Spirit" was given at Pentecost. This gift not only brought understanding but with understanding brought hope through faith in the promises of God revealed in Christ. As children of God through the Spirit, all of creation is being restored to its original goodness.

Romans 8:16 "Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"

While Paul argues that those who believe are children of God, Jesus' parable of the

prodigal son could be seen to argue that all are children. Which do you believe?  
How does that belief effect the way you deal with others?  
What does this say about judging others?  
If, as the prodigal, we are all children only some are lost and far from home, does that effect how the church should act in the community?

### **Commentary on Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Matthew continues to recount Jesus' agricultural parables with the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Various commentators have pointed out that in their early stages, wheat and certain types of weeds are very difficult to distinguish until the wheat begins to produce grain. This would fit with Matthew insistence of judging a tree based on its fruit (Matthew 3:8-10, 7:17-19, 12:33). The position of the actors in the parable is important. Christians are "slaves of the householder". The planters of the seeds are the "Son of Man" and the "devil". Note that the field belongs to God alone and therefore it is God alone who will judge which crop is fitting. This focus on leaving judgment up to God which is a theme in Matthew has been linked to early problems within the Christian community. Despite the idealistic view of the early community in Acts 2:44-45 of sharing everything, the community was divided from the start with Judas and then the greed of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). This will be a major issue with Saul/Paul due to his past history with the movement. Jesus' teachings concerning judgment in the hands of God alone forces followers to emphasize grace over legalism. Grace, however, is not the removal of judgment but rather a delay of judgment into the hands of the One who judges all. Matthew statement of judgment which includes "gnashing of teeth" refers to a pain so great that people literally crush their teeth and grind the jawbone under their gums. God alone can make this kind of judgment.

Matthew 13:29 - "in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them"

Have you ever been too quick to judgment?

Has someone judged you without knowing all the facts?

Like the field, have you ever looked back at the field of your life and wondered, "What was I thinking or not thinking as the case may be?"

Do you find grace in this postponement of judgment or dread at the promise that there will be a final reckoning?

Thinking back on Saul/Paul's life, do you think a weed can become wheat by the grace of God?

### **Sermon "Weeds, Wheat, or Peanuts"** ([Sermon Video](#))

When reflecting upon the state of humanity, I am theologically guided by Genesis 1:31, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" and Romans 3:23. "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". We were originally created to be wheat but we all have weeds. I have rarely found individual's who are only children of good or children of evil. I have witnessed individual's striving to be good and others who do evil out of a place of extreme brokenness and pain. Black and white solutions rarely reflect the whole picture. Most people, like those in the Bible, have both wheat and weeds. Black and white solutions rarely reflect the whole picture. Sometimes we need to weeds in order to fully appreciate the wheat.

In what some people consider weeds, others have found medicine or unconventional solutions to problems. The peanut, most likely brought over from Africa, was considered a poor person's food and a bothersome weed until George Washington Carver showed how that weed could replenish the soil and help cotton to grow. While we should avoid doing evil (weeds) and do good (wheat), sometimes we need down time (peanuts) in order to recharge our soil. Peanuts can be quiet time on the

porch or a game with family and friends. Peanuts can be a vacation or a simple jigsaw puzzle. It is often during these times when we step away from the temptations of the world and the obligations of doing 'right' that we are still enough to hear God. And maybe, this is the point of the parable. It is only when we give the judging between good and evil to God that we can receive the joy of the life we have been given.

Jacob, a weed if there ever was one, was on the run from his brother and heading to his scheming future father-in-law. It was during this in-between time that he stopped to rest and found that God was there waiting. He realized that God is always receiving the prayers of his people (angels ascending) and pouring out grace and mercy (angels descending) even on the weeds. Despite his actions, God still blessed Jacob and promised that He would not give up on Jacob. When Jacob stopped scheming, he found that God already had a plan. God still had a plan to harvest good from Jacob's life and all the weeds that Jacob acted upon would be turned into peanuts that would make the harvest that much better. Jacob's life would not be easy but it would become an inspiration for all those who found themselves with a field of weeds wondering if anything good could ever come of it.

God desires that everyone's life reach their fullest potential. The law was sent not to force people to wallow in the weeds and sit in fear of the judgment but to turn toward the Master Gardener for help and advice. Jesus came to show those who had forgotten and those who had never been told that they are loved and that God will care for your garden if you have faith. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit like the angels descending and ascending to work the field, nurture the crops, and transform the weeds into peanuts. For it is during those moments when our weeds become peanuts that we realize that nothing is impossible for God. In death there is resurrection and in pain there can be joy. Life is not simply wheat and weeds but there are peanuts. Let God be the judge and the gardener and learn to love the peanuts in your field.