



Sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter, April 2020

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Genesis 25:19-34](#)

[Psalm 119:105-112](#)

[Romans 8:1-11](#)

[Matthew 13:1-9,18-23](#)

I want to invite you today into a time of deeper meditation.

With all that is going on around the world and in our communities, we feel the stirring and whirling – and we can be tossed and tugged.

With our many months now of some withdrawal from the many social activities we were used to, we might have found time for deeper reflection and meditation.

It's now into our 5th month, since March – and, actually, for some who saw the threat of this pandemic coming earlier, since February or even January. Liz, our new temporary parish administrator who is stepping in while Emily is on leave, worked for years as director of Flying Doctors, a Christian medical mission organization similar to Doctors Without Borders. In February, these doctors saw what was coming with the coronavirus and shut down all flights for this entire year.

This has not been an easy time. Many must continue working every day at the sites of their work, not working remotely, and often in places that carry increased risk. Children have had to do school at home, and parents and grandparents are stepping in to “home schooling” to help kids learn and get their work done. Things are very much up in the air for how we will proceed in all areas of our society as we face growing cases with growing hospitalizations. How shall we live, in such a time as this?

Most of us have reduced our exposure and withdrawn at least from some public situations. We have had more time with ourselves and with those in our household. It may have been a golden opportunity to get some projects done, to meditate more deeply and focus more on our own lives.

But we simply haven't wired ourselves that way, most of us. A meditative, contemplative, reflective pattern of life takes practice, and takes time for the rewiring to take hold. I've found this unsettling quiet with an uncertain future to be unravelling me in some ways – and probably some helpful ways. I have lost some of my

attachments to visions of what I would achieve and who I think I am. I have begun to let go of some grinding expectations, and some dreams. I have found myself opening to the unknown with a bit more ease and acceptance. So, that's good. But, I have not taken the time I had hoped to meditate and pray more deeply, on a regular basis.

So, I can't blame my schedule anymore. I have more open space. I can't blame the tug of multiple projects and efforts. I have to face the truth that I am who I am, and that includes that I can be prone to drift from thing to thing and not to choose the focus I want to have.

Today's scriptures from Genesis and from the Gospel of Matthew invite us to some deeper meditation on ourselves and our own lives. I want to invite you into that space with me. And, I want to take a lesson from Carl Jung here in approaching these stories and parables with a big perspective on the complex nature of our selves. It would be easy for us to consider these stories and parables and ask, "Which character am I in the story? Which type of soil am I?" But the story and the parable today take us deeper when we consider how we can find every single one of the characters, every single type of soil, in ourselves.

In Genesis, we come along in the accounts of these early people chosen by God – the God who calls to and speaks to all people, and who seeks to draw all people to himself – but the God who chose and reached out in unique ways to Abraham and Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael her son, Isaac and Rebecca, and now Esau and Jacob.

Who are you in this story? Whose story have you lived?

More deeply, what parts of yourself do you find resonating with, humming in recognition with, in each of the characters of this story, in each of the events?

It's easy to read the scripture and read ourselves into the stories with the most comfortable characters – the ones who are blessed in some specific way by God. But we are, each one of us, more than one character – and we can find ourselves in each and all of the characters – Cain as well as Abel, Hagar as well as Sarah, Esau as well as Jacob (well, none of us really want to see ourselves as Jacob the conniver), the people of Egypt benefitting from slavery as well as the enslaved Hebrew people.

So, what of you do you find in each of the people in this early family in scripture?

What in you has been Isaac, the silent one, the one who survived the blinding and frightening faith of his father that took them far out into the world away from others and that took Isaac to the threat of death – who found life again with Rebecca after he lost his mother, his only true comfort?

What in you is Rebecca, full of life and vigor, and daring to take a journey that echoed the journey of Abraham two generations earlier, to leave all that was familiar and go to be with a man she had never met because she was willing to trust the messenger-servant – who herself was not able to have children until she was older, and then bore the unsufferable wrestling of her twins while pregnant and in all the years that followed – having two nations at war within her?

When are you Esau, hairy and strong and ruddy and loving outdoors, hunter, burly wild-man, maybe a bit Neanderthal, living life in the wild and the fields, thinking with his gut and following his immediate hunger, who despised what was given to him by birth?

When are you Jacob, smooth and smaller and quieter, a watcher, a guy who loved life around the house and tents, a cook, maybe a momma's boy, thinking on his feet and snatching at an opportunity to get what he wants, who stole what belonged to someone else by a cheap bargain?

We are all broken, weak, fallible, and sinful – and sinned-against. We are all gifted with unique gifts, and bear and show glorious images of God. And we are set free through Jesus Christ from sin and death and so do not need to hide ourselves in shame. There is no condemnation, as Paul says in Romans. No condemnation, so we can be free of shame and fear and hiding.

The question is, can we learn, and can we face the reality of all that we are and have been? And, can we grant others that same complexity, assuming that they also carry a similar range of wounds and gifts, of weaknesses and created glories?

So, now to the New Testament, to the Gospel. This is my favorite of Jesus' parables.

A sower went out to sow. And the sower spread the seeds everywhere – just, everywhere.

What kind of farmer is this? What kind of sower just throws seeds everywhere?

This is God's generosity – God's wastefulness. God is not so efficient and tidy. God is wasteful, squandering, profligate in spreading seeds everywhere, on every type of ground.

We could ask, what kind of sower are you? Are you a careful, reserved sower or planter, who treasures and holds seeds for just the right moment, the right soil, the right conditions? How might God open you and me to be a bit more wasteful and generous in our spreading of the seeds of God's goodness, grace, and love?

Then there is the other set of questions.

What kind of soil are you?

More deeply, where do you find each of the different soils in yourself? Because, I bet, they're all there.

Where in your life has there been, or is there, hardened soil – packed down by traffic and pressure, ruts, trails, asphalt roadways that won't give way much? Where is impermeability in you?

Where in your life has there been, or is there, rocky soil – gravel or rocky backfill dirt that construction workers pack against the foundations of a new house, not finer grit or depth for seeds really to anchor in, maybe some pools of water but nothing for any but the heartiest of seeds to reach down beneath to where they can get some water and nutrients? Where is shallowness in you?

Where in your life has there been, or is there, thorny soil – the soil full of weeds that just don't give way? I've got this green, fernlike weed that's sticky and clings to anything, and clings to and covers the leaves and stems of what I'm trying to grow in my garden. What is like that in you? Where is distraction and overcrowding in you?

And where in your life has there been, or is there, the rich, good, healthy soil – full of all sorts of good stuff that supports growth, whether things have grown and blossomed and born amazing fruit? Where is full receptivity and nurture in you?

We are all of these, each one of us. And, thanks be to God, the seeds keep dropping – everywhere in our lives and in every person’s life. Because God is generous. Because ALL the earth is the Lord’s. Every bit of ground – even the most impervious. Here in our paved area in front of our columbarium where people’s ashes are interred, we have these beautiful little pansy-like yellow and purple flowers appearing in cracks and segments of the sidewalk. They weren’t planted. Seeds just find their way. Seeds just find their way. Thanks be to God. God’s goodness, grace, and love showers down on all ground in our lives, in every person’s life.

I invite you to meditate on these questions through the week. Look honestly at your life and ask how you have been each character in the story, each type of soil in the parable. And look generously at others around you, trusting that they, too, are complex and textured beings like yourself. And allow God to go to work within you on each type of ground, each character. By being honest with ourselves and God, we open space for the Holy Spirit’s transforming presence.

Amen.