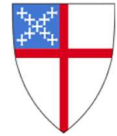




Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Ern Warner, August 2, 2026



Genesis 32:22-31 Romans 9:1-5 Matthew 14:13-21 Psalm 17:1-7,16

Thank you, Lord, for the blessings of our days. Strengthen and guide us so that we may be an echo of these blessings for others.

Sometimes the readings do not seem to provide a cohesive theme that is even easily interwoven—or it could just be me. Today's readings encouraged me to conduct a character study of the passages to see what I might find.

The Old Testament reading is complex, and I found it necessary to expand on it to fully develop my thoughts. We are talking about Jacob, who displays multiple personality facets that reveal him as a complex person, especially important since he is the father of the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel.

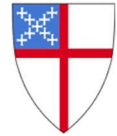
We've been hearing quite a bit about Jacob, both in last week's sermon and in this week's church memo. Jacob had his brother Esau sell him his birthright for a bowl of stew, instead of Jacob providing it to him as a gesture of hospitality. Jacob then conspired with his mother, Rebekah, to obtain Esau's blessing from their father, Isaac. Esau was the firstborn and the rightful heir, but Rebekah loved Jacob. After Esau discovered Jacob's deception, he plotted Jacob's death. Rebekah advised Jacob to go to her brother's house to escape Esau's wrath and to find himself a wife.

In a twist of the story, Jacob is tricked by Rebekah's brother, Laban. Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel, Laban's daughter, and told Laban he would serve him 7 years for her hand in marriage. At the end of the 7 years, Laban gave him Leah, Rachel's older sister, claiming it was their custom, and Jacob went into another seven years of labor to obtain Rachel. Laban's flocks prosper under Jacob, who devises a devious way to obtain some of the best of the flocks for his own. After Jacob and Rachel are married, he flees from Laban with his wives, servants, and animals. He does not know that Rachel has stolen her father's household gods. Laban pursues Jacob, and words are exchanged, but



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reason seems to prevail. Jacob allows Laban to search their belongings for Laban's household gods, but Rachel thwarts his efforts with a ruse of her own. Jacob and Laban enact a covenant between them, and Jacob continues on his way home, only to be told that Esau is coming to meet him with 400 of his men. Jacob sends his family, servants, and flocks ahead of him to meet Esau, instructing his servants to use some of the animals as an offering (bribe) to Esau. He perhaps seeks to earn a reprieve from his fear of what Esau might do to him.

Jacob is left alone; a man appears, and they wrestle through the night. Neither prevails, and the man strikes Jacob's hip, laming him. As daybreak approaches, the man wants to leave, but Jacob will not let him go. Jacob demands a blessing. The stranger asks Jacob's name, then tells him he is to be known as Israel, for he has striven with God and humans and prevailed. Jacob cries out that he has seen God face to face, and his life is preserved. Then Jacob goes to meet Esau, perhaps still dreading the worst, yet is welcomed by his brother. Jacob tells Esau that seeing his face is like seeing the face of God, now that he has received him favorably.

The person in the Psalms seems quite sure of themselves, perhaps a little too sure. I wonder who among us could truthfully pray these words to God? Yet the words "Show me your marvelous loving-kindness" pertain to both the saint and the sinner.

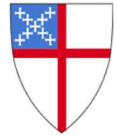
I found the section of Paul's letter to the Romans difficult. It seems he is torn between his conversion to Christianity and his Jewish heritage. Paul can be a bit unfathomable at times.

In the gospel reading, Jesus withdraws to a deserted place by himself. He had likely just learned of the beheading of John the Baptist, who had been closely intertwined with his life and ministry. Perhaps he also felt threatened, but his grief must have been



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overwhelming. The crowd follows him, driven by their own needs and seeing him as one who can provide for them. Jesus sees them and has compassion for them. The verb used for compassion (*splagchnizomai* - *splangk-nee-zo-mi*) means not just a tug at the heartstrings or a wistful yearning, but a strong, visceral feeling — the core of your being shaken. Jesus sets aside his personal concerns and ministers to the crowd, healing the sick among them.

It is getting late, and his disciples tell Jesus to send the crowd away so they may go to nearby villages and buy food for themselves. But Jesus tells them they need not go away; you give them something to eat. Here is a shift in the story. The disciples have only five loaves and two fish. Jesus has the crowd sit on the grass as if at a banquet, blesses the bread and fish, and has the disciples distribute the food. We are told that 5,000 men, along with women and children, ate and were filled, and that 12 baskets of leftovers remained. A miracle? And perhaps an opening for the disciples to understand their coming ministry even more fully.

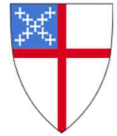
The question becomes: who are we in these scenarios? Are we the trickster, Jacob, always seeking an angle, cutting a deal, and worrying about the ramifications of how we have treated people? We are told Jacob was favored by God, but can we be assured of such a relationship if we treat others as Jacob did? Esau seems to be the one who truly changed in that story; at the beginning, he threatened Jacob's life, and at the end, he welcomed Jacob back as a brother. Perhaps this is the blessing that God gave to Jacob.

Paul is a bit of an enigma. He began by persecuting the Christians, then had a blinding conversion and was sent to minister as a Christian to the Gentiles. Yet he remains a Jew, and he lives in a land where both Jews and Christians live. He moves toward his future, yet he seems to still be held tightly by his past.



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Jesus had withdrawn, perhaps to work through his feelings about John's beheading. Yet the crowd follows him—he has become so important to them. They seek relief from the ailments and uncertainty of the world. Jesus responds, setting aside his concerns and ministers to the crowd. Then the disciples tell Jesus, "Send the crowd away." They do not have enough food for them—they should seek food in the nearby villages. And Jesus says those words that are so important: "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." He shows his disciples their mission in life: it is not to send people away; their mission in life is to provide for people. Can we do that today? Can we tell people that they need not go away?