

Sunday, October 6, 2023

First Lesson: Matthew 7:7

Second Lesson: Genesis 32: 9-12

Sermon Series: Prayers that Move Mountains Week 4:
Jacob

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- We are concluding our 4-week sermon series called, “Prayers that Move Mountains.” This is a sermon series that will use our First Lesson of Matthew 7:7 that we just heard and that will serve as the central theme of the sermon series; “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you;” and see how it manifests itself in each focused prayer of study for the week, with the hope that our discoveries will speak to our life situations and experiences of today.
- In addition, the sermon format for how we will engage in conversation each week will be by

applying the Wesleyan Quadrilateral Model as a tool, to ensure that how we are engaging our scriptures are thorough and exhaustive;

- For just a quick recap on what this Wesleyan quadrilateral model is; The United Methodist Church, asserts that “John Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, **illuminated by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason.**
- Therefore, this morning what we are asking, seeking, and knocking on the door for, is for a deeper connection and understanding for where our scriptural lesson of focus is coming from this morning in which I will name to **be Jacob’s Prayer.**
- So to begin with the **Scriptural** portion of Jacob’s prayer; this text that we are engaging this morning, is a unified composition, that

prepares both the reader and listener for Jacob's encounters with God.

- For everyday, what I feel led to name —is that **you and I have encounters with God.**
- **Some of our encounters** can be more divine in nature; like that of Moses who descended Mount Sinai with the tablets of the covenant, where the scripture of Exodus 34: 29-35 tells us that “the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.”
- **Other encounters with God** can be similar to walking outside and seeing the leaves turn and begin to fall, with an understanding that regeneration is inevitable in this symbolic moment.
- Or for me personally, **every time we engage in the time of community prayer**, to share our joys and concerns within the safety of this beautiful and historic sanctuary together, informs

me that the presence of the Lord is very much here and alive.

- This past week, we wrapped up another charge conference that was filled with many joys and some concerns;
- Yet even in some of those uncertain moments, I felt the presence of the Lord in a new and meaningful way,
- For the leadership, strength, support and wisdom that came from our District Superintendent was life-giving to witness;
- Most importantly, I believe that we came together as a mustard seed of the larger congregation, with new clarity, purpose, focus and visioning, that reinforces our commitment to strengthen our bedrock foundation that is community centered, focused and minded to share God's love to everyone.

- For ultimately, that is what a successful Charge Conference is supposed to do, reenergize and refocus us for another year of ministry—and so by that understanding, I declare and decree that we have successfully completed another charge conference year together!
- Therefore if you serve on any committee of leadership in this community of Lincoln First United Methodist Church; whether it pertains to staffing, finances, building, worship and worship design, service, mission, facilities, small groups and more; will you please stand to your feet as you are able, so that we can celebrate your work of prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness....thank you!
- For all of this and more is how we encounter God in my eyes.
- Getting back to our text this morning, this is what I am meaning when I name that the prayer of

Jacob from a scriptural perspective, is framed by Jacob's encounters with God;

- For we can see Jacob's encounters with God in verses 1-2 that was not included in our reading of Chapter 32, but is important for me to name to give us a fuller context; that says, *Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him; 2 when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called that place Mahanaim;*
- Similarly, Jacob had an even earlier encounter with God that was actually his **first encounter** with God, that can be found in Genesis 28:12; *in which Jacob had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it;*
- Interestingly enough where I was mistaken and would be remiss if I did not name to our Wednesday night class, that the major

encounter with God in which biblical scholars would name **to be Jacob's fourth encounter with God**, that I thought had already occurred prior to this prayer that is in our reading today, in which Jacob essentially fights with God at the shallow part of the Jabbok River;

- I learned that the fight with God happens after our prayer of focus, which can be found in Genesis 32: 22-31;
- Which gives us then a whole new meaning and understanding for how we are to receive Jacob's prayer of focus today;
- For **at face value**, what the Wednesday night class noted immediately in Jacob's prayer, is that it did not come off as sincere as Hannah's prayer from the week before;
- In which I would like to publicly celebrate our Wednesday night scholars and proclaim that the

biblical research would cosign on your thoughts here.

- For it was in the midst of a fearful moment, that Jacob prays, in which this factor in itself, is why biblical scholars are divided about the sincerity of Jacob's prayer.
- For one of our Wednesday night tables noted that Jacob's prayer in itself seemed to be transactional.
- And I believe where they derived to this conclusion lies in verse 9 where it says; *And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,'*
- For it is in my personal experience, where I have observed that **transactional relationships** are typically built on the expectation of reciprocation.

- **For in transactional relationships**, both individuals are concerned with how they will benefit.
- Furthermore **it is in these transactional relationships**, that individuals are typically self-serving, making sure they get as much as they can from the relationship for a set amount of work in return.
- Thereby making the question for us to ponder, are transactional relationships healthy?
- My instinct is to readily proclaim that transactional relationships are not healthy, whether it be actual relationships or spiritually.
- For part of my reasoning lies in an article entitled “Why Love Should Be Transformative, Not Transactional by bloggers Jaleel and Nicole; whose main premise of this article is to name that transformational love builds you up, while transactional love breaks you down;

- Thereby making the right kind of love being one that does not require us to take but to give!
- For transactional relationships in my life experience only breeds resentment.
- For over time, transactional relationships tends be unideal, simply because no one likes to feel used, particularly when the situation involves something as important as our livelihoods.
- **Tying Jacob's tradition** into our discussion; Jacob was initially raised to be a man of transactions.
- **For his relationship with his mother was transactional**; when his mother Rebekah and Jacob tried to cheat his father by pretending to be Esau so that he could get the first blessing.
- For the tradition of this era, was that the oldest son would be the one who would receive the best of the inheritance that was more than physical wealth and belongings, but it released a

power that effectively determined the character and destiny of the recipient.

- For in this tradition, a blessing of this substance was like an arrow shot toward its goal, where it was believed to release a power which could not be retracted.
- **Jacob's relationship with his father was transactional**; for it would appear that all Jacob wanted from his father was all what was entitled to him; and so it would be when his father Isaac was dying and losing his eyesight, Jacob being the smooth man on many levels that he was, would put some goat skins on his arms to fool his blind Dad into thinking he was his brother.
- **Jacob's relationship** with his brother Esau was transactional; for all it took was a bowl of stew when famished in which Esau readily sold his birthright over to his brother; not to mention history would also reveal that Esau disregarded

God's law, married women outside of Israel; all which supported this idea that Esau didn't even respect his birthright in the first place.

- All of this and more is a valuable conversation for us to close our prayer series out on;
- For the overarching takeaway for us to consider is that Matthew 7:7; *“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you;”* is not something that invites us into a transactional relationship with God;
- Matthew 7:7 is all about teaching us how to be in a transformative relationship with both God and one another!
- For the doors that were opened up eventually even for Jacob, even though he was initially seeking to line up transactions that would benefit his bottom line and agendas;

- In exchange, God opened up doors for Jacob that made it possible for reconciliation between his brother;
- That allowed him to wrestle with and through some of his problematic upbringing and to overcome it in a way where God was able to use Jacob for God's glory;
- For the Jacob who was returning to Canaan was not the same Jacob who had left Beersheba twenty years before.
- From the moment he had met God at Bethel, he had been different.
- Previously there was no record that he had any kind of religious life.
- For Jacob depended entirely upon his own wits and his mother's counsel.
- Jacob was intensely selfish.
- Jacob gave no evidence of being conscience-stricken over his ill treatment of his twin brother.

- But after Bethel, **the name of God was often upon Jacob's lips.**
- Which then invites me to recall the popular love chapter for us of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a that teaches us that *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.....*this is God Church....
- And oh what the world would and could look like — **if the name of God was upon our lips?**
- What would our Churches look like **if the name of God was upon our lips?**
- What could our relationships with one another be like **if the name of God was upon our lips?**
- What could you and I be like **if the name of God was upon our lips?**

- Transformative God, May the words from our mouths and the thoughts of all of our collective hearts be shaped in your Holy and Righteous Sight—for thine is the kingdom and the power and the Glory, forever Amen!