

## Trinity 8 2020

2 <sup>nd</sup> August Trinity 8	9.30 Family Communion	Genesis 32 vv 22-31 p36 Romans 9 vv 1-5 p1135 Matthew 14 vv 13-21 p981	SoF 530 vv 1-4 The God of Abraham 12 All Over the World 144 Great is the Lord 22 A New Commandment 530 vv 5-9 There Dwells the 301 Jesus Shall Reign
2 <sup>nd</sup> August Trinity 8	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 32 vv 22-31 p36 Romans 9 vv 1-5 p1135 Matthew 14 vv 13-21 p981	SoF 148 Guide Me O 54 Servant Song Psalm 145 43 Bind Us Together 50 Break Thou the Bread 111 For I'm Building

**O** GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's Old Testament lesson is one for which we really do need the story so far. God had instructed Abraham's father to leave the city of Ur where the family all lived. By the standards of the time, Ur was a civilised city, but the people of the city worshipped idols and it was no home for God-fearing people. Terah settled in Haran and, after Terah's death, God told Abraham to move on and settle in the land of Canaan which the LORD promised to Abraham's descendants. There, after a long while, Isaac was born. Isaac married Rebekah from Haran. At first, Rebekah proved barren, but, after prayer, she conceived twins. Even in the womb, the boys fought. God told her that each would be the father of a nation. The first to be born was Esau, father of the Edomites, and his younger brother became the father of the Israelites. God could tell Rebekah this even before the boys were born because, as we said last week, God knows us in all eternity and we are part of His eternal plan for His world.

If you'd known the two lads when they were growing up, I think you'd probably have liked Esau better. I'm sure I should have. Esau seems to have been a much more straightforward young man. He was a hunter and spent a lot of time out in the country. Jacob was more a home boy. Unfortunately, their parents had favourites - never a recipe for a happy home. Isaac liked Esau better. Rebekah preferred Jacob.

One day, Esau came in from hunting, starving hungry and asked Jacob for some of the lentil pottage he was making. Jacob wouldn't give him any. He sold him some in return for Esau giving up his rights as the firstborn. In my judgment, Jacob was mean, but the Bible condemns Esau for so cheaply selling something so precious as his birthright.

Later on, when their father Isaac was very old and blind, Isaac told Esau to catch a deer and bring him some venison. Isaac would then give Esau his blessing. Rebekah overheard their conversation and persuaded Jacob to take Esau's place and fool the old man. They took a couple of kids and made a stew. Rebekah dressed Jacob in Esau's clothes and put the goat skins on his arms. Esau was hairy, whereas Jacob was smooth skinned. The deception was successful. Poor blind Isaac was deceived and Jacob received the blessing meant for Esau.

Esau was so angry that he said he would kill Jacob. Rebekah discovered what Esau was planning and persuaded Isaac to send Jacob off to her brother Laban's household, still back in Haran. There he fell in love with one of Laban's daughters, Rachel. He agreed to serve Laban for seven years so that she should become his wife. This time Jacob was tricked and he married Rachel's older sister Leah instead. So he served another seven years for Rachel and had two wives, plus their handmaids, of whom he would beget twelve sons and one daughter. After Jacob married Rachel, he continued to serve Laban who paid him in sheep and cattle. Eventually, Laban's sons began to think that all the family wealth was accruing to Jacob and became jealous. So Jacob thought that he had better go home to Canaan and he set off, taking his wives and his immense possessions of flocks and herds with him.

But then there was the question of Esau. How would Esau receive him after twenty years absence? Did he still want to kill him? Jacob divided the company into two bands, saying that, if Esau's men caught up with one band, at least the other would be safe. He also sent flocks and herds as presents to meet Esau. Finally, he sent his wives and children across the brook Jabbok and spent the night alone, wrestling in prayer. This is today's Old Testament lesson. Jacob wrestled in prayer all night and God blessed him. God gave him the name Israel and confirmed the blessing and covenant which He had bestowed on Abraham.

Three points then. Jacob and the other people in the story make their own decisions for which they are responsible. Lots of things happen to them, some good, some bad. They have a whole variety of experiences and adventures. Sometimes they seem to succeed. Other times they apparently fail. They have hopes and fears. They overcome their fears with the help of God. Their hopes are realised or not depending on what God wills for their lives. In many ways, their lives were very different from ours, but the basics don't change: relationships with God and with other people; family; friendships; people who don't like us; the need to earn a living and to be provided for; life and death; sickness, disability and health; youth, maturity and old age; the procreation of children and providing for their future, and for generations yet to come; our responsibilities towards those who are growing old and less able. Every human life is different and we all live our own stories and yet our stories are part of the whole, the history of the whole of our humanity.

The second point is that, although all the people in the story are responsible for what they do with their own lives, everything that happens is within the Providence of God. The story will continue with Jacob's sons, Joseph's brothers, selling him as a slave in Egypt and God using this wicked thing which they have done to provide food for His people in the coming famine. The whole nation of Israel will much later be enslaved, but God will bring them back to the land which He had promised to Abraham and His seed. As the story unfolds, after hundreds of years, Jesus will prove to be the seed of Abraham in Whom, not only Israel, but all nations will be blessed. All our lives are threads in God's embroidery which is being completed in accordance with His pattern. The end of the world will be the completion of what God intended in the very beginning. Our lives are in His Hands as He weaves us into His tapestry. We do not have to be afraid. We are God's workmanship.

Then, finally, like Jacob in the story, we connect to God in prayer, wrestling in prayer if necessary, receiving His blessing, empowered to live the life He has given us.