

July 21, 2019
Rev. Kerry Smith

Genesis 33:1–10 Family Reunion
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Genesis 33:1–10 Common English Bible

Jacob looked up and saw Esau approaching with four hundred men. Jacob divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two women servants. He put the servants and their children first, Leah and her children after them, and Rachel and Joseph last. He himself went in front of them and bowed to the ground seven times as he was approaching his brother. But Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him, and they wept. Esau looked up and saw the women and children and said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children that God generously gave your servant." The women servants and their children came forward and bowed down. Then Leah and her servants also came forward and bowed, and afterward Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed. Esau said, "What's the meaning of this entire group of animals that I met?" Jacob said, "To ask for my master's kindness." Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what's yours." Jacob said, "No, please, do me the kindness of accepting my gift. Seeing your face is like seeing God's face, since you've accepted me so warmly.

Our scripture today is about a family reunion. In July we don't have our choir singing so we sometimes use the screen that we have here. About a month ago I watched a clip from Ellen and I got teary eyed. I want to share that clip with you.

SHOW CLIP. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LDV9GmO7GQ>

Wasn't that amazing? I was crying watching an Ellen clip! There is a story of a family reunion in the Bible that I want to share with you. READ SCRIPTURE.

Jacob and Esau. Did your parents have a favorite? Jacob knew about favorites. Jacob and Esau were twins, Jacob was his mom's favorite and Esau was his dad's. Esau was born first so he would receive a double portion of his dad's inheritance. Jacob offered to give his brother some stew in exchange for that birthright. Then with his mom's help, Jacob tricked his dad and received the blessing that was meant for Esau. Esau was really hairy and Jacob wore a goat fur so his nearly blind dad Isaac would get confused and give him the blessing and birthright meant for Esau. Jacob had to leave because Esau said he was going to kill his brother. Jacob meets Rachel but ends up marrying Leah and Rachel too.

Twenty years pass. Jacob decides to return home and he is very nervous about seeing his brother again. Jacob sends some messengers ahead of him to tell his brother that he is coming, and the messengers return saying that Esau has 400 men and they are on their way. Jacob is terrified and he divides all the people that are with him and all of the livestock into two camps thinking that if Esau and the 400 men destroy one camp then the other camp will escape. Jacob sends a present ahead to Esau, 220 goats, 220 sheep, 30 camels, 40 cows and 10 bulls, 30 donkeys. Jacob thought that he could appease his brother's anger with the presents that he sent ahead of him.

So, Jacob takes his 2 wives, his 2 maids, his 11 children and everything he has and sends them across the stream. Jacob is alone knowing that tomorrow he will see his brother again. His brother that he cheated, his brother that he stole from, his brother that hated him. That night a man wrestles with Jacob until daybreak. In the book of Hosea the writer says Jacob wrestled an angel. Jacob says that he saw God face to face, so it could have been God that night. So, Jacob and this man or angel or God are wrestling and Jacob demands a blessing. And Jacob is renamed Israel which means one who struggles with God. The story ends with what we read this morning. Esau running to meet Jacob, embracing him, falling on his neck and kissing him as they wept. Forgiveness.

I have been reading a book called *Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World* by Adam Grant and he shared a study where there were two groups of people. One group was asked to write down three good things about their lives and the other group was asked to write down twelve good things about their lives. Afterwards, which group do you think said that they were happier? The group that had to write three good things or the group that had to write twelve? The twelve group right? I mean the more blessings you count, the better you should feel, right? The opposite is true. If it is easier to think of something, the more common and important we assume that it is. It is about the ease of retrieval. It is easy to think about three good things about our lives. Since it is a breeze to think of a few positive responses, we infer that our lives are pretty good. The group that was asked to write twelve good things after listing their family and their work asked if they could list their friends individually to help them get to the number twelve. Since that group struggled to come up with a dozen good things, they concluded that their lives weren't quite so good after all.¹ The opposite works as well. If we were divided into two groups and one group was asked to write down three bad things about their lives and the other group was asked to write twelve bad things about their lives, the three group would say that they were happier. It was easy to name three bad things but harder to name twelve bad things so life could be a whole lot worse.

Jacob did some horrible things in his life. But he didn't give up on himself, he didn't give up on his family, he didn't give up on love, and he didn't give up on God. He was able to accept that he was lovable. And he claimed that love, he claimed God's love. He knew that he was a beloved child of God and that he was worthy of God's love and blessing. Yes, he struggled, with his family, with his work, with God, but through that struggling he remembered that God loved him, from the very beginning.

Crises have a way of helping us discover who God is and who we are. It is those times when I have felt like a disappointment or a failure, those tough times in my life, that reveal who God is and who I am. So it was for Jacob. He was able to see all of the ways that God had blessed him his whole life long. He needed a crisis to help him see this but he did see it.

May we see ourselves as God sees us because God made us and God sees us as good, as beloved. When we face a crisis, may we struggle through the process, trusting that we will see the blessings of God all around us.

¹Grant, Adam. *Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World*. P. 74.