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February 28, 2021
Sermon Text: Genesis 28:10-17
Because of Christ's Obedience:
We Have Peace with God even in Adversity

FAITH WAITS

He was a venerable pastor, adored by his colleagues, especially by the younger pastors. He always had sage advice mixed with a little cleverness to make it stick. He was tall with a deep, commanding but assuring voice. I visited him shortly before he was called home to heaven. Tentatively, I opened the door to his room in the nursing home and peered in. There was an easy chair extended all the way back and his tall body was stretched out on it. His eyes were closed and his hands folded on his chest. I tiptoed into the room and spoke somewhat softly, "Pastor? It's Luke. How are you doing?" Without opening his eyes he replied, "I'm waiting for the summons from my King."

That's what faith does. It waits.

This is the lesson Jacob had to learn in Genesis chapter 28 as he huddled against a rock in the vast desert darkness. The sensation of aloneness must have been pressing down on him like a heavy weight. Jacob was young. He had a lot to learn about life and God and faith – and family relations. One of the most important lessons he would spend a lifetime learning was that faith waits. That's what faith does. It waits. For if you had the thing right now that you're waiting for, there would be no reason for faith. So today, from the example of Jacob in Genesis 28, let's you and I also learn this lesson: Faith waits.

Jacob had a twin brother, Esau. Before the boys were born God gave this message to the parents, Isaac and Rebecca: *The older will serve the younger*. Esau was born first and thus belonged to him the family birthright. The birthright referred to what was rightfully yours for being the firstborn. Typically, it meant that if you were the firstborn male, you would inherit the family farm or the family business. You were the heir.

What Jacob received was a special promise from God, a special blessing from God of being designated the ancestor of the promised Savior. Thus the family line of Jesus would go from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob.

Of the two boys, Jacob by far received the greater honor and prestige to be named an ancestor of the Messiah!

But it sure didn't look like it.

Imagine Esau, with his dad training him, conferring with him on all the matters pertaining to managing the farm, dictating to teams of workers when to shear the sheep and what price to barter for the wool at market, overseeing the birthing of the lambs and directing repairs to be made on tents and saddles. He would appear certainly to be the head of the household.

It is possible that Jacob presumed with his status as the declared ancestor of the Messiah, it should be he who held prominence in the household. It didn't seem right that he should play second fiddle. Therefore in a deceptive way – we won't say how because that's a different story that we're not dealing with today - Jacob cheated his brother Esau out of the birthright. And when it appeared that his aged father Isaac was about to pronounce an official, divine blessing on Esau that truly should have been Jacob's blessing, Jacob tricked his father into blessing him. The result was that Esau was enraged. From his standpoint he had been cheated twice! Esau vowed to kill his brother Jacob. Talk about sibling rivalries! So Jacob fled.

All the posturing, positioning and deceiving did not help Jacob's situation. It made things much worse. Far from appearing to be the distinguished patriarch and progenitor of the Messiah Most High, Jacob had become a fugitive with nothing but his staff in his hand. To look at the situation, it would appear Esau was the one who had kept everything and stayed in the position of favor with his parents and respectability with the neighbors and was blessed by God.

What did Jacob learn? On the one hand, he learned humility for his sins of presumption, deception, and lack of trust in God. On the other hand, Jacob was learning that faith waits. God makes a promise and faith waits. You can't force it. You trust that God will fulfill the promise in His own time. So faith waits.

Being so young and rash, Jacob very well could have despaired out there, ostracized and alone in the wilderness. But God didn't abandon him. God revived Jacob's faith and encouraged him with a special visitation and promise, an expanded promise that belonged to his designation as a Messianic ancestor, a truly astounding message. It may have appeared that Jacob was a fugitive and a nobody with nothing to show. But listen carefully to what God says was really the case for Jacob: *Taking one of the stones there, Jacob put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He 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. There above it stood the Lord, and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.*

These promises are huge! But notice, God didn't tell Jacob how his journey is going to turn out, whether there'd be food to eat or any scary rivers to cross, whether he'd ever see his parents again or that it would be seven years yet before he'd marry a wife. God doesn't warn him about the hardship, toil, and sorrow that lay in store for him. God doesn't tell him that 20 years from now he'll return this way with twelve sons and thousands of livestock. No, for the fulfillment of these astounding promises, Jacob must wait. But that's what faith does. Faith waits.

Yet these promises of God implied that God also would take care of him in the meantime. For how could God fulfill these promise to Jacob if Jacob weren't around? Thus these promises of God had the power to sustain Jacob so that he could face the next day and get up from the dew-covered ground and go forward.

Perhaps at times you are inclined to sigh and wish that you could have such a special revelation from God as Jacob's dream. But you know what? You do! And on a much more regular basis. It happens every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Ultimately, in Jacob's dream God pointed Jacob to the most important thing: the Savior who would be descended from his body and who would bless all nations. In the Lord's Supper, it's the Savior who comes to you. Jesus Himself crosses over from heaven and comes to you personally. Not merely connecting with you as on a ladder, but giving to you His body and blood in the bread and wine you receive. Can He get closer than that? It is truly a holy and spectacular event.

There are many aspects of God's promise that the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob never did see here on earth – like taking possession of all the land where they were living as foreigners, or their descendants being as numerous as the sand on the seashore or even the arrival of the Messiah Himself. But faith waits. The New Testament book of Hebrews tells us: *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. They were longing for a better county – a heavenly one.* Faith waits.

When you receive the Lord's Supper, it may seem like a contradiction. You are told that your sins are forgiven and therefore you are a holy saint of God, that you are free from death, victorious over the devil, glorified with Christ and a co-ruler with Him over an eternal Kingdom. All of that is true, even right now. But we don't see it

with our eyes. What we see and feel is that we are still sinful, still annoyed by satan's harassments. We may still be enduring the most burdensome, humbling or heart-breaking life situations and we still have to die. So faith waits.

One day, we will see all of God's promises fulfilled clearly, no longer veiled, no longer hidden. In the meantime, the implication is if God has forgiven our sins for Jesus' sake, if He has rescued us from death and glorified us with eternal life, then He will also see us through and take care of us in the meantime until He brings us to that full realization. God makes the same promise to us that He made to Jacob: *I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.*

There lay Jacob alone in the vast darkness. Yet, you could say on the basis of the promises God made him, Jacob owned the whole world and was accompanied by all believers and all the saints and angels of heaven and even walked with God Himself. But could he see it right then? Only by God's promise and thus only by faith. And faith waits.