

Sunday Ordinary 18 Year A 2020

The story of Jacob so far.

**Family is complicated. Love is complicated. Life is complicated. History is complicated.**

We all know children can suffer trauma and that killing our children is wrong. Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, takes Isaac, Jacobs father, out in to the desert where he gets him to gather wood for a fire on which he is to burn his dead body, then sets about tiring him up, placing him on an altar and draws a knife to kill him. Isaac is saved by an Angel.

God blesses Abraham with a promise to give him the land he is standing on and to make his descendants as numerous as the stars of the sea.

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We all know passing your wife off as your sister is wrong. Isaac does this because Rebekeh is beautiful and he is fearful of what may happen to him because of that.

God blesses Isaac and makes him rich.

God blesses Isaac with Abrahams promise.

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We all know that paternal favouritism is wrong. When Esau and Jacob are born as twins they are competitive even in the womb. Isaac loves Esau and Rebekah loves Jacob. It is no wonder there are problems between the two.

We all know taking advantage over one of our siblings for gain is wrong. Yet Jacob encourages Esau to swear his birthright to Jacob for a pot of vegetarian stew.

We all know lying, deceit and theft are wrong. Rebekah overhears Isaac talking to Esau and conspires with Jacob to steal Esau's blessing as the elder son. Jacob agrees and they lie and deceive and steal that blessing. Esau hates Jacob because of it.

We all know lying, and deceit are wrong. Rebekah deceives Isaac in to sending Jacob away to find a wife so Esau will not kill him.

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We all know that what Jacob and his Mum have done is wrong. As Jacob camps and sleeps on his first night away from home he has a dream, and God blesses Jacob with the same promise God made to Abraham and to Isaac. Jacob makes a covenant with God.

We all know that treating women and men unequally is wrong. We all know that swapping your daughters for labour is wrong. We all know lying and deceit are wrong. Laban and Jacob reach an

arrangement over Jacob working for Laban, in exchange for Laban's daughter Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel. Laban swaps his older daughter Leah for his younger daughter Rachel on the wedding night. Leah loves Jacob.

We all know slavery is wrong. When Leah is "married" to Jacob, Laban "gives" Leah his maid Zilpah. When Rachel "marries" Jacob, Laban "gives" his maid Bilhah to Rachel.

We all know that polygamy is wrong. Jacob has two wives and two slaves who all bare him children.

We all know favouring sons over daughters is wrong. Jacob is blessed because he at this stage has 10 sons and only one daughter.

God blesses Jacob and makes him very rich.

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So far into Jacobs story none of us are feeling like he or any of the men we have seen in the story, are good men. They certainly did not live in enlightened times, as we see them now. Rebekeh, Leah, and Rachel, not to mention poor Zilpah and Bilhah, are women, and as such are at the bottom of the heap, the latter two, slaves as well.

Yet God blesses these men, the Bible says, and by extension, in the context of the time, as terrible as it may sound to us, these women as well.

In New Zealand we live in very different times to these, we shout hallelujah to that, even though as we look around there is obviously a long way still to go, and doesn't that give us a bit of a clue to this story. Even through things are very different, when we look at our context, and the times that we have been through, the things that have happened around and through us, then take an honest look at our lives, the things we have been involved in, the things we have done, and said, and thought, isn't this story, Jacobs story, our story too, sure the context is different, but for us isn't ...

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isn't this true for us.

Yet God continues to bless us ... because isn't this what grace is ...

... that we aren't judged on our own good ... but on the goodness and love of another...

Thanks be to God.

Amen.