

## **Genesis 27:1-4, 14-23; 28:10-17**

Biblical scholar Renita Weems has described Jacob as “the first real human being” in the Book of Genesis. She goes on to say that with the appearance of Jacob on the scene, “we finally have someone with adjectives we can use — deceptive, clever, shrewd.” Prior to Jacob, she notes, characters seem to be more one-dimensional in that they “pretty much do what God says,” protesting only a bit here and there. Jacob, though, exhibits a much wider range of human behaviours and impulses, often in a marked departure from the high road that Abraham takes as the first patriarch. And although we might not want to admit it, we can probably identify with Jacob more fully.

Jacob comes into the world gripping his brother Esau’s heel. In Hebrew, the verb that is used means “to follow,” or “to come behind” while as a noun it means “heel.” Our first encounter with Jacob as a young man suggests that he was well named and that little has changed in the intervening years — he’s still struggling with his older brother. As Esau returns from a long day of hunting, famished, the conniving Jacob persuades his hungry brother to exchange his birthright for a bowl of stew.

With Esau’s birthright in hand, Jacob and his mother devise a more audacious scheme. Disguised as Esau (wearing his brother’s clothing and attaching animal skins to his arms and neck), Jacob provides a

“counterfeit” meal for his blind father, to replace the one that Esau was supposed to prepare. He then asks his blind father to bless him. While Isaac isn’t entirely convinced that he’s blessing the right son, he goes ahead and gives Jacob his blessing. In summing up what has just happened to him, Esau alludes to yet another meaning of Jacob’s name when he says, “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing.” Jacob might also mean “someone who cheats.”

The term “trickster” is used in folklore studies to describe wily heroes who use devious means to achieve their ends. Breaking rules, upsetting customs, moving from place to place, using disguises, engaging in deception, and telling lies are part of the trickster’s job description. Trickster figures are the quintessential boundary crossers. No boundary — physical, moral, social, or even cosmic — is beyond the ken of the trickster.

So, Jacob is the “trickster extraordinaire” of the Hebrew Bible. We can compare him to other similar figures in culture and literature, from Reynard the Fox in medieval Europe, Puck in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Anansi the West African spider-trickster, and Brer Rabbit from African-American folktales, to Bugs Bunny, the Joker in *Batman*, and Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Jacob crosses every line that presents itself in the story. No rule, no tradition, no relationship appears to be out of bounds as he schemes to get what he wants. In short order, he alters the line of inheritance, disrupts the chain of blessing, disrespects his father, and puts his brother in a vulnerable position, both socially and economically. But Jacob's win isn't decisive — he doesn't live happily ever after, as tricksters rarely do. In fact, in the next episode, Jacob seems to have met his match in his Uncle Laban who has some tricks of his own. And the cycle of trickery will continue beyond that — Jacob's own sons will deceive him when they present him with the bloodied coat of his favourite son, Joseph. Tricksters win some, they lose some, and they come back to try again. Maybe we can identify with Jacob precisely because he is a trickster. There is scarcely a culture in history that hasn't contributed to the treasury of trickster tales.

Another moniker that has been given to Jacob is "The Dream Thief." The story of the dream thief goes back to those long ago times when the great nations of history were still just men and women starting families and figuring things out: the age of the ancestors. During the age of the ancestors, dreams were much bigger and much heavier. They weren't the whisper thin dreams we have today that dissipate as soon as morning comes. They were thick and dense, full of portent and meaning. This was the time of blessings and curses, visions and prophecy. People believed in the power of dreams and were guided

by them. They believed that dreams came true! Recall the story of Joseph who became the king's Dream Interpreter.

A bad dream was more dangerous than fire and a good dream, more valuable than gold! But dreams, being bigger and heavier, and more valuable in those days, meant they were also much easier to steal. Not as easy as picking a pocket, mind you, but if you were skilled in the art, you could walk off with another person's dreams. And no one was a more skilled dream thief than Jacob.

Now you might object to calling Jacob, the great ancestor, a thief. But that is exactly the point. It was never Jacob's dream to be a great ancestor. That dream originally belonged to his brother, Esau. Esau dreamed every night about the man he would someday be. He dreamed of inheriting his father's flocks and being the head of his father's household. He dreamed of being a great man in the land that he grew up in; the kind all his friends and neighbours came to asking for help or advice, one they looked to for leadership in times of crisis, in short: a great ancestor. Esau had these dreams every night, but Jacob had no dreams of his own. His sleep was silent as a graveyard.

But one day, Esau came in from the field after hunting and he was famished. He hadn't eaten in days and was on the verge of collapse. And the first thing he smelled when he entered the tent was the delicious red stew that Jacob was making. "Gimme some of that red

stew!” Esau said, “I’m starving.” Jacob smiled. “Only if you agree to trade me your dreams.”

Esau was beside himself. “My dreams? What do I care, I’m starving. You can’t eat dreams. Sure. Now give me that red stew!” Jacob said, “You have to swear first. Swear that your dreams are now my dreams.” So Esau swore and he ate the red stew. That night when Jacob went to sleep, he dreamed about being a great man, inheriting his father’s flocks, and everyone looking to him. Meanwhile, Esau’s sleep was silent as a graveyard.

As big and beautiful as Esau’s dreams for himself were, they didn’t hold a candle to his father’s dreams for him. Esau was Isaac’s favourite son. And everyone knows that a parent’s dreams for their favourite child often dwarf even their dreams for themselves. So if Jacob was going to snatch this dream, it was going to take some planning and an accomplice.

Now Isaac was going blind and was rarely out of his bed. He was also at the age when parents relinquish their dreams willingly to their children. So, with his mother’s help, Jacob, who was *her* favourite, came into Isaac’s tent in disguise wearing Esau’s finest robe. He wore goat skins on his arms and neck so he would feel hairy to the touch, like Esau. He also brought a goat stew which his mother had prepared

to taste like the wild game Esau always brought.

Isaac thought that Jacob was Esau who had come to honour him with his favourite meal. When Isaac ate the supposed game and was satisfied, Jacob made the request. In his best Esau voice he said, “Father. You are getting old and I don’t want you to die before you give me your dreams for me.”

“Of course,” said Isaac, so he kissed Jacob and gave him all his dreams that were meant for Esau; dreams of heaven’s dew and the earth’s richness; dreams of his brothers bowing to him and dreams of his name being a blessing. Jacob smiled. That night, Jacob dreamed even bigger and more beautiful dreams, and Isaac’s sleep was silent as a graveyard.

But as big and valuable as a father’s dream is for his favourite son, it does not hold a candle to God’s dream for his chosen people. That would be the greatest dream of all. The score of a century. And Jacob, the dream thief, happened upon this one quite by accident. In fact, he found this dream just lying on the ground, unaccompanied. And what else is a dream thief to do?

Soon after Esau found out that Jacob had stolen his father’s dreams for him, he became enraged and wanted to kill Jacob. So, like any

good thief, Jacob slipped out of town. He was on his way to Harran where he still had some relatives he hadn't burned bridges with, when he stopped at a place called Luz. He went to the foot of a hill to sleep and there he chanced on a smooth stone. The stone was cylindrical and it fit the back of his neck just perfectly, so he decided to use it for a pillow. Little did Jacob know that this stone was no ordinary stone. It was a dream stone!

In the age of the ancestors, when people took dreams very seriously, they often sought god-sized dreams. Dreams that could reveal hidden mysteries to them about their past, their present, and their future. So they would go to sacred temples or outdoor shrines where they would perform elaborate rituals and offer sacrifices. Then they would sleep next to sacred objects like a dream stone and have a big god-sized dream. In the morning they would tell their dream to the priests, who would interpret it for them.

Now Jacob had no idea he was sleeping in one of these sacred spaces. Why did he not know? Perhaps the space had long been abandoned by the Canaanites, but the fact that it was once sacred still made it sacred. Or maybe the space was still very much in use but only on Friday nights, or on the full moon, or something like that. Or maybe the space was not yet sacred to anybody, but the fact that it would someday be sacred to the Israelites meant that it was sacred

still. Maybe Jacob was drunk and didn't know where he was.

In any case, Jacob had stumbled on to one of the most sacred places on earth and had chosen a sacred object for his pillow. And without any ritual or sacrifice, he goes to sleep and begins to dream. And it's a ***big god-sized*** dream!

In his dream Jacob is looking up and sees a great staircase stretching forever into the starry night sky. It's a staircase like the kind you would find on a mountain or a ziggurat, leading up to a sanctuary. But instead of leading up to an earthly sanctuary, these steps are leading up to heaven itself. There are beautiful beings of light going up and down the staircase. Somehow, Jacob knows that these are God's messengers, coming and going. He looks up, and at the top of the staircase is a great light. To look at the light fills Jacob with both a sense of strangeness and familiarity, peace and fear, unworthiness and love. Suddenly Jacob is acutely aware that he is trespassing in someone else's dream. He's not supposed to be here. And yet, the light takes notice of *him* and seems to recognize *him*. It speaks. And even as it speaks from the top of this infinite staircase, Jacob can hear the words clearly as if they are coming from inside him. But they are not. He could not possibly dream these words himself:

*"I am YHWH, 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.”*

It was then that Jacob woke up sweating — heart pounding! He thought to himself, “This was a sacred place and I had no idea.” Jacob was afraid. His heart was filled with dread. He wasn’t supposed to be here. He had finally stolen the wrong dream! “This is God’s house,” he said, “The very gate of heaven.”

And then Jacob closed his eyes once more. He was too afraid to dream this new dream again, but all other dreams paled in comparison. So for the rest of the night, Jacob’s sleep was silent as a graveyard.

When Jacob woke up in the morning light, he wasn’t quite sure what to do. On the one hand, the dream clearly wasn’t meant for him. He should probably leave the stone just like he found it and pretend the whole thing never happened. But, on the other hand, he couldn’t quite shake the feeling that the dream **was** meant for him. After all, hadn’t

God spoken to *him* about *his* family and *his* destiny? Made promises to *him*? Maybe God had meant for Jacob to find this dream and have it. Maybe he should just take the dream with him.

Instead, Jacob cut the difference. He took the dream stone and stood it up. Then he poured oil on it. And he said, “Look God. I didn’t mean to take this dream from you. I just found it here. But what’s done is done. Now it’s all I can think about. Your dream is bigger than any dream I’ve ever had, and I don’t think I can let go of it. Here’s the deal, I’ll trade you my life for this dream. If you make it come true: if you go with me, provide for me, and bring me home safely... If you do all the stuff you said you’d do in the dream last night, then you will be my God and I will serve you. I’ll come back here and make sure that staircase you dreamed about gets built. Along with a temple. Heck, I’ll even tithe! But please, just let me be a part of this beautiful dream of yours.”

And so it was. The dream thief became an honest man (to a point). He offered his life in exchange for God’s big beautiful dream. And God went with him and provided for him, and brought him safely home. And God continued to meet Jacob in his dreams. Once, Jacob even saw God, face-to-face, and the two of them wrestled all night. Or at least he thought they did. He might have dreamed it.

As humans, we can't seem to get enough of the Jacobs, the Brer Rabbits, and the Jack Sparrows of the world. We like to laugh *with* them, then *at* them, and we like to daydream about getting away with whatever *they* do. We also like the fact that tricksters never give up — they might disappear for a while, but we know that they'll be back.

Enjoying Brer Rabbit stories is one thing, but having tricksters in the Bible is quite another. Jacob is a particularly fascinating trickster in that God sticks with him notwithstanding his behaviour. Just after having pulled off the heist of a lifetime, Jacob finds himself on the run, alone, in the wilderness, somewhere between the home that he has left behind and the refuge he seeks with his mother's brother, Laban. Maybe one of the reasons we identify with Jacob comes from our deep desire that God will stand by us too, despite everything.

There are other reasons for our fascination with, and attachment to, trickster figures. Tricksters are not all bad, they can in fact, turn out to be indispensable cultural heroes as well. Hermes the Thief invented the art of sacrifice, the trick of making fire, and even language itself. Coyote taught the race how to dress, sing, and shoot arrows. Eshu taught men and women a way to know what the gods are thinking. In other words, tricksters are creative. They expand our notions of what it means to be human by challenging our imaginative capacities.

In addition, tricksters challenge us to think about our social configurations and the rules we live by in new ways. Tricksters always appear where cultures are trying to guard their eternal truths, their sacred cows. New cultures spring up whenever some trickster gets past the guard dogs and steals those cows. This is precisely what Jacob does — by breaking the rules and forging a new path, he opens up the possibility for the “people”, Israel, that will descend from him.

There are so many unanswered questions regarding God’s choice of Jacob. Did Jacob know what he was getting into when he stole his brother’s birthright and blessing? Did God choose Jacob because of, or in spite of, these deceits — or were they irrelevant? What is clear is that God’s promises to this trickster are exceedingly generous and unconditional. No one could deserve such a gift, especially Jacob.

As children of God and followers of Jesus, we have been chosen as well, and not because we earned it. Not all of us are chosen for the same roles or at the same times. The body of Christ is blessed with a variety of gifts, after all, and no one of us has all of them. Yet whatever is our status, we can trust that God’s promises endure, whether it is our turn to be the blessed or the blessing.

**Amen.**

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE - SEPTEMBER 21, 2025**

Spirit of God, breathe your calm, loving, hopeful breath into a hurting and anxious world. Both the places and people we know that are hurting as well as the hurting situations unknown to us. Teach us to grow in our compassion and care for the whole world and everything in it. May your love and presence enter into the hearts of all of your people. May hope bloom and suffering be healed. May compassion transform us and contribute to goodness and love that ultimately overcomes hate. May we breathe in your peace and breathe out love through our words and actions.

In the communion of your Church with one heart and one soul, we pray for your created world. You created the universe and all that lives and exists in it. The earth is filled with your creations. You make the grass, plants, and fruit-bearing trees grow, you feed the birds of the sky, the sea creatures and fishes of our oceans, rivers and lakes; you care for all your creatures on Earth. Out of your love you created human beings; give us the strength to be faithful stewards of all we have been blessed with in your created world.

We pray for your created humanity. Grant that we may treat our fellow human beings in a good way with respect and dignity. May we accept and welcome everyone as precious in the rich diversity of all people. May we support and uphold the human dignity and inherent personal integrity in our relationships with others. Give us a grateful and humble heart, that we may see ourselves as part of the great and rich whole of which you have created humanity. Grant us compassion, understanding, responsible thinking, and meaningful work according to your will and purposes.

We pray for the sick, the destitute, the marginalized, the oppressed and the vulnerable. We pray for our fellow human beings and for all fellow creatures affected by war, conflict, genocide, and ecocide. Serve justice to those who cry out to you, and to those who have no ability to cry out. Humble our hearts to relate to our fellow creatures in distress as true brothers and sisters. Give us the courage to act on behalf of those who silently endure injustice and guide our steps in the way of reconciliation and long-lasting peace.

Breathe out generosity and provision of all that supports and sustains life into spaces where hunger and disasters are dominating the lives of so many. In particular, in Palestine, Sudan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, and for the Rohingya people living in uncertainty and need. May you strengthen all who are working with limited access to resources to provide needed fresh water, food, shelter and safety to the many in dire living conditions. In each act of

humanitarian aid and innumerable acts of mercy and kindness, may your Spirit be present to bring hope.

Breathe your peace into a world where violence continues to be rampant. Today, which is observed by people of faith around the world as International Day of Prayer for Peace, we add our prayers for peace in a world longing for healing, justice and reconciliation. We pray especially this week for peace in Israel and Gaza, as well as in Ukraine and other places, where innocent people are being hurt and killed, where displacement is rampant, and where the basic needs of food and shelter and the comforts so many have no longer exist. May your peace blanket our world.

Breathe justice and freedom over West Papua, Indonesia, where voices are silenced and suffering is hidden from the world. We pray for those experiencing oppression and violence there, for truth to be told, and for your protection over the people. Breathe your healing breath over them and may the world not forget them or any of the places where suffering is unknown to us.

As we remember World Patient Safety Day, we lift to you all people who rely on public healthcare systems that are fragile, under resourced, or broken. Be with the caregivers, the health care professionals, hospital workers, and staff in community clinics who provide such vital care. May your healing breath touch the lives of those who are physically in need of healing and care.

As world leaders gather at the United Nations in New York, may you stir in the hearts of our leaders a commitment to put the needs of people first over political agendas and attitudes that engender divisiveness. Give courage and resolve to these leaders to work collaboratively together so that the well-being of our world now and in the future is held paramount.

We call upon the nations of the world to hear the cry of those who have suffered loss of homes, lives and hope because of climate change. May they hear the cry of those whose schools, churches, hospitals, roads and infrastructure have been damaged. Give them strength, endurance and hope as they rebuild their lives and communities.

We hold in our prayers; Living Faith Lutheran in Sechelt, being served by Rev. Richard Hergesheimer (Interim), Rev. Glenn Inglis (Presbyterian); Lord of Life Mission in Sandspit, supported by Rev. Jim Whaley (Interim), We pray for your blessing on Bishop Larry Kochendorfer who will be installed as our new national bishop on September 27<sup>th</sup>. We pray for: Pope Leo XIV; ELCIC, ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Shane

Parker, the congregations and Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Imad Hadda and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. We pray that you would bless the ministries of all deacons, pastors, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers.

Holy God, God of love, We pray for family and friends who are suffering: those struggling physically or emotionally, those working to overcome mental illness; those facing challenges at home or at work; those grieving the death of a loved one. We pray for the family of Sig Peterson as they grieve. Today we also lift in prayer Dawn Hill, and Josh. Give them strength to recuperate, to find peace. Surround them with your love and compassion.

As we breathe in your hope, may we be instruments of your peace and extend your compassion into the world. Lord, come and tell us what is ours to do. We are your body here on earth for a while. We are listening for your word for us – your purpose, your dream, your story told by the lives we live. Be present to your children who are not near us, except through our prayers. Though we may never meet them, make them part of our stories on this earth and in the life to come. And so, Lord, we come to you today. Meet us as you meet our kin, in the cries, the tears, the love we share. We will meet you there. In the loving name of Jesus Christ, we pray the prayer you taught us ...

**Our Father ...**