Trinity 19 – October 26, 2025 (Reformation Sunday and Farewell Sermon)
Text: Genesis 28:10-17
Theme: Remember You are Israel not Jacob

When his mother gave birth to him, Jacob was grabbing a hold of the heel of his twin brother Esau. So, he got the not so regal name of "Jacob" which means "Heel Grabber." This became an idiom in Hebrew speech for one who deceitfully takes advantage of another to get ahead. So, you probably heard in Sunday School that Jacob means "deceiver."

It was a fitting moniker. Jacob was always the one with a plan to get things the easy way. And he and his brother fought back and forth a great deal. This was not a happy Christian family. Dad liked Esau better than Jacob, and Jacob was Mom's favorite. Mom helped Jacob deceive to get what Dad was giving Esau. There was no shalom in this home.

The point is that eventually, like with most liars, it all came crashing down on Jacob's head and he had to run to avoid being killed by his big brother. So, he took off with nothing but the clothes on his back and when he was tired, he camped under the stars with a stone for a pillow. In the night God came to him in a dream and Jacob had his famous vision of the heavens being opened and angels going up and down the great staircase to heaven; Jacob's Ladder.

And God reminded Jacob of who was running the verbs in his life. It's not Jacob, Mr. heel-grabber, Mr. buy the birthright for a bowl of stew (that's a whole other story), Mr. lie to you father to get him to give

you the blessing which by the way comes WITH THE INHERITANCE. All of the deceitful things Jacob had done were completely unnecessary and benefited no one! God was going to bless him anyway.

Listen to what God says to Jacob, but listen carefully because you and I are the descendants of Jacob and so He is speaking to us as well.

"Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Do you hear that? All we need, we already have. God will keep us wherever we go until he brings us back to Eden. Do you hear that promise? You already have everything.

Maybe you clear six figures a year or maybe you do well to clear four. Maybe the roof over your head covers four bedrooms, or maybe it is something just slightly better than a shed. No matter what you think you have, it can all be gone in the blink of an eye…and then what? Then what do you have? When your house and your car and your money and your health are all gone…then what do you have? You still have EVERYTHING! That's what God promises. You still have everything because you have his promise made to your forefather, Jacob!

But you don't believe it, do you? Our actions speak louder than our words. We fear poverty. We fear illness. We fear homelessness.

That's why we worship at the altar of the state lottery because we always feel if we just had that security of a couple million in the bank, then we could relax. Not many of us desire to be filthy rich but we just want to be sure that we don't have to depend on the Outreach House next month to eat. The hard truth is that we take greater comfort in a solid retirement plan than we do in our Father's promise to be with us always. We find greater joy in dreaming of winning the lottery than we do in already having been given paradise. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." And conversely, where your heart is, sooner or later, that's where you treasure will be. So, get your heart out of your wallet. As my sister likes to say, "Grab a crowbar and pry that baby open!" If the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, then trusting in money is that root's fertilizer.

When has God ever failed you? He has provided food, clothing, shelter, family. None of us are even really hungry much less malnourished. Then he provided, on top of that, his own son to suffer the penalty for our greed, our selfishness, our self-centeredness, our idolatry. We are his beloved children and what he did for Jacob, he has done for us.

God changed Jacob's name from "Heel Grabber" to "Israel," "one who struggles with God." And so, we too continue our struggle to let go of our wallets, to stop depending on human beings and human will, to abandon hope of earthly deliverance, and to trust in God. Our names

change little by little as faith grows. Faith grows as we read and study the Word, worship, receive the sacrament and remember our Baptisms. We struggle with God, because he is incomprehensible, uncontainable, invisible…and yet our faith clings to him as our only true hope, as our real deliverer.

Today we celebrate the Reformation and what a perfect day for this text as we spend our entire lives being reformed by God. Slowly through the power of Word and Sacrament, God turns us away from the Jacobs we were at birth to the Israels He has made us through Baptism. We are His children who struggle day in and day out to grow beyond our earthly bonds and to touch the face of God. We see Heaven opened up above us as Luther did before us when the Church was in her darkest hour. And no matter what earthly calamity befalls us next, we know that we are Israel, forever the children of God and inheritors of paradise.

Here is where I leave you, and it's a good place. I have been your pastor for 21 years and together we have moved closer to being the Israel that God has made us. I am moving on to another flock but you keep reforming yourselves. Keep growing into Israel. Continue Always Growing in Christ. God has already chosen your next shepherd and soon he will be revealed to you. Embrace him with the same love and devotion with which you embraced me and God will lead you into another century of exciting service to Him.