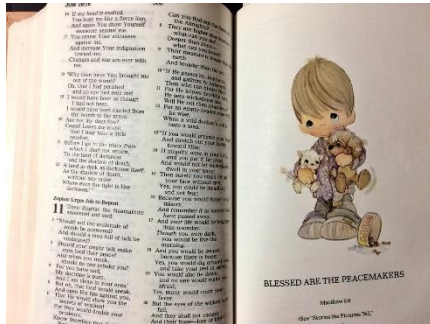


Struggling with scripture is lifetime journey. I want us to think about the Bible for a moment. What is your first memory of the bible. For me, it was in in 1986 – I know strangely specific, but my Grandmother bought and gave me my first bible, a Precious Moments Bible on January 4, 1986. I loved looking at the pictures even if I didn't get all the stories that were in the book, the pictures told me so much about God. The first picture that I remembered and carried it with me in my heart and mind was this picture.



It stuck with me for several reasons, I had cats & dogs and understood they did not always get along with each other. I usually had bandaids on my knees or elbows because I would fall but probably most of all because I was always trying to get people to get along. I hated when there was fighting, especially if I was a part of it. I wanted everyone to get along.

The second picture that I remember is this one – reminding me the essence of this book. As I grew older and learned the stories that it contained, there was struggle because some of the stories did not make sense when God is love. How could Cain kill? How could God destroy everything except what was on the ark? Why did people want to arrest Jesus? Why didn't the disciples believe/trust what Jesus was teaching them? As I grew and found people using scripture in ways that did not make sense, instead of reading more, I read less. I believed in God & Jesus but scripture made people yell at each other.



These may seem like strange things coming from your pastor. But I know that I am not alone in my struggles with scripture. For me, going to seminary and having professors who

taught me how to engage scriptures, learning about context, history and translation coupled with deepening my faith in God began to transform how I felt about scripture. I hope that we can continue in our struggle with scripture.

This has all be going through the back of my mind while preparing for worship this week learning Jacob's story. I struggled. I had always felt a kinship to Jacob, wrestling with God and limping away. I knew that he cheated Esau out of his birthright & blessing – I knew he was the trickster and yet I was left this week with stories of how he tricked and then was tricked. I wrote 2 sermons that I were not bad but I couldn't find a sense of why this text mattered. And while driving to church I was reminded of an essential truth.

In our readings for this week we hear the rest of the story of Jacob tricking Esau, specifically what & how he did it. We get a fuller understanding that we have and probably have more questions than answers. Next we read about Jacob traveling to his mother's home town and meeting Rachel and he is then tricked by his uncle. This is the same man who had just tricked his brother. What does this story tell us about God and who & how we are called to be in the world? What changed for Jacob on the journey? The short answer. He fell in love. To quote a song – "He would do anything for love."

The man who lied, deceived & cheated to get whatever he wanted changed. He did things differently because he wanted to be with his love. Jacob's love for Rachel brought new life into his life. Lest we think this is a happily ever after story, what about Leah. The woman, whose father deceived her future husband to marry her off. The woman, whose husband doesn't love and only stayed in the marriage to have his true love, her sister. As we read this part of the story it does not feel as if love is doing anything for Leah. But love even changed her life. God's love for Leah, opened her womb and gave her children. Love, love changes everything.

What would look different in your life if love was the guiding principle? I don't mean this in a superficial way but in a deep and meaningful way. Hear me out. We reserve love for those that we love. It's why we compromise on what we watch on tv or eat because someone else in our lives likes it. It was my love for my children (and love of my own sanity) that had me sit and watch Thomas the Tank Engine and Paw Patrol episodes. I did not really enjoy or get anything out of it but it meant so much to my children. I watch certain television shows with Josh because he likes and it is something we can do together. I've learned to make things in the kitchen that I won't eat because someone in my life loves it. But what happens when we bring this love out of our homes?

What if we practiced understanding instead of frustration when a car is not moving at the green light? What if we assumed best intentions when someone shares, not just a story but reason for doing something? What if that person just needs someone to listen? There are people that I do not like in the world. But those people are loved, first by God and second by other people. There must be something good, I just need to work to find it. I realize this sounds ludicrous. I realize it does not make sense to those outside of our faith. But faith is not rational. Faith is believing God and trusting what God calls us to do. I need to grow in loving others. Not those that I already love but those that perhaps push buttons. I need to grow in my capacity for loving people I do not understand. Why, because love changes everything.

When we look at Jacob's stories, not just the ones we've read but when we look from the beginning of his life to his end, love transforms over and over again. When we look at scripture, love transforms not just the people but the world. For God so loved the world. Will you join with God and grow in love? In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.