

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Lent 2

February 28, 2021

Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran

Trust me

— Genesis 28:10-17

How trusting are you? On the one hand, there is a lot of skepticism in our world. Maybe it's because we have been burned by those who have made promises but fell short of keeping them. Maybe someone has tricked or scammed you through a false sense of trust.

On the other hand, we can be too quick to put our trust in things that at any moment can be swept out from under us. In Psalm 33 David wrote, **"A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save."** What's the modern day equivalent? Probably your car. You trust that when you put the key in the ignition it's going to start. You trust that it will get you to work. You trust that at 76 miles an hour on the highway a tire is not going to come off and send you into a terrible accident. I've heard multiple ads over the last month that went something like this, "In these uncertain times, the one thing you should be able to rely in is your car." Talk about a vain hope for deliverance. Or another psalm states, **"Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save."** Do we put our trust in mere human beings as though they will be the answer to our greatest needs? Those are just a few examples of our human tendency to want to put our trust in things.

We, by nature, have a strong tendency to misplace our trust in a lot of things, but perhaps the most common and the least reliable object of our trust is ourselves. I trust in me! One of the most basic instincts we have is the fight-or-flight response. When danger strikes, I either have to fight or get out of there. Whichever I decide in a split second the purpose is to save myself. It's a basic instinct that comes very naturally.

That's what we find Jacob doing in Genesis 28. We catch him in mid flight, running for his life from his brother Esau. Why was he running? Well, Jacob had brought this trouble upon himself, with the help of his mother. Long story short, Jacob was the twin son of Isaac and Rebecca. His brother Esau was technically the firstborn which gave him the birthright. But later in life, Jacob, which loosely translated means trickster, lived up to his name when he tricked Esau into giving him his birthright for a bowl of stew (read more about that in Genesis 25). Sometime later Rebecca, Jacob's mother, advised Jacob to approach his father, Isaac, and trick him into receiving Esau's blessing, the blessing that should have been reserved for the firstborn son. Esau nursed a grudge against Jacob and wanted to kill him. So Jacob fled to his uncle Laban's house in Haran, hundreds of miles north. Along the way, Jacob stopped someplace to spend the night. He was alone in the desert, found a rock for a pillow, and fell asleep.

While he was sleeping **"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. ¹³ There above it stood the Lord...** I'll pause right there because this image of God and a stairway can be easily misunderstood. We naturally might see God in that way. We're down here on earth; he's up there in heaven and there is a ladder between him and us. And the misconception is that I have to climb the ladder to get to God. I have to try hard. I have to surmount the obstacles of sin and temptation and do good. That's how I can climb the ladder closer and closer to God.

But the Lord didn't come to give Jacob a system by which Jacob could climb up to heaven. He came down to Jacob with a promise. **The Lord 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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."**

What a sweet dream! It's like the Lord was saying to Jacob, "Trust me!" The Lord didn't just say, "Trust me." He gave Jacob a very concrete promise to trust. It was the same promise he spoke to Grandpa Abraham and Father Isaac. The promise had to do with a place, but it also had to do with a person. Through Jacob's offspring or descendant, all peoples would be blessed. You keep reading Scripture and you see that that offspring is Jesus Christ.

God didn't give us a tiered system to ascend to him. He gave us his Son. God descended to us. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was born as a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. True God came down from heaven because even if we had all eternity to climb our way to heaven, we'd fall eternally short. But Jesus came down from heaven and his message was essentially, "Trust me!" He invited people to repent and believe the good news. Jesus invited people to trust and follow him. To trust and follow Jesus entails self-denial. That's one of the crosses we bear—we fight the inclination to trust ourselves.

Often times I trust me. When something goes wrong our gut reaction is to say, "I got to fix this?" And maybe with a lot of things in life that kind of attitude works. There are a lot of things that we can handle, there are a lot of things that we can fix; things that are within our realm of control. But then we realize there are so many things that are completely out of our control. I can take necessary precautions so that I don't get sick and yet a tiny virus or a cancerous cell can render me utterly incapable of doing anything. To put it more bluntly, I have no control over death. And death is really just a symptom of sin. Do I really want to trust me?

But when Jesus says, "Trust me." What a difference! Jesus doesn't just say trust me, he gives a concrete promise for us to trust. Our faith is in a real person and in a real promise that has been fulfilled. Jesus came down from heaven. He lived and experienced life as we know it with pain and suffering and temptation. He suffered and died to bring you to God. Then he rose from the dead. And on this basis, he says, "Take heart, your sins are forgiven." Trust him. When your heart rightly convicts you of your sin, your self-reliance and pride, but then Jesus says to you, "Trust me, your sins are forgiven," trust him. Rest in that forgiveness! When the devil would have you think that God has left you and forsaken, or when you simply feel lonely and despised, Jesus says, "Trust me, I am with you, I will not forsake you," trust him. When even death and other consequences of sin send you running for hope listen to Jesus when he says, "Nothing can separate you from his love..." trust him.

So whatever happened to Jacob? You can read on your own sometime how the Lord blessed Jacob in the decades following his dream. But twenty years later, Jacob was returning to the Promised Land just as God had promised. He was a bit nervous of how his brother Esau might receive him. But there's a notable change in Jacob. He's not scheming. He's trusting and praying. In Genesis 32 two he prays an exemplary prayer trusting and relying on the very promise he made that night when he was on the run. Then later that night, Jacob was once again all alone and the Lord appeared to Jacob as a man and he wrestled with Jacob. Jacob wouldn't let go. He said, "***I will not let you go unless you bless me.***" Jacob was not pulling someone's leg, he wasn't grasping for straws to find a way out of his bind. He was clinging to the Lord and his promise, and he just wouldn't let go.

Hear Jesus' call this lent to repent and believe. We've clung to a lot of things in this life. We've put our trust in a lot of things that cannot save. But finally we can let all that go. We've carried a lot of shame and guilt and anxiety, as I'm sure Jacob did. Even that we can let go of. Then all we are left to cling to is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We cling to Jesus and his cross and even the cross he gives us to bear. And as we cling to Jesus in simple trust and follow him to his cross as you hang on to him for dear life, remember he doesn't leave you out there to dangle. He made the same promise to you as he made to Jacob, "***I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go... I will not leave you.***" Trust me, God says. Amen.