

St Thomas Methodist Church, Exeter

July 2026

Weekly Worship Resources

05 July – Going God’s way

Abraham’s servant is sent on a mission to find a wife for Isaac. He enlists God’s help, praying that God will make the way clear, and encounters Rebekah who seemingly fits the brief. Rebekah commits herself to God’s way by agreeing to leave her family and marry Isaac. Both the servant and Rebekah want to do things God’s way – but how did they decide which way that was? And how do we discover what God’s way is for us?

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 9 Year A

Genesis 24:34-38,42-49,58-67; Psalm 45:10-17; Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Romans 7.15-25a; Matthew 11.16-19,25-30

Genesis 24:34-38,42-49,58-67 [CEV]

³⁴The servant explained:

I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵The Lord has been good to my master and has made him very rich. He has given him many sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and donkeys, as well as a lot of silver and gold, and many slaves. ³⁶Sarah, my master's wife, didn't have any children until she was very old. Then she had a son, and my master has given him everything. ³⁷I solemnly promised my master that I would do what he said. And he told me, “Don't choose a wife for my son from the women in this land of Canaan. ³⁸Instead, go back to the land where I was born and find a wife for my son from among my relatives.”

⁴²When I came to the well today, I silently prayed, “You, Lord, are the God my master Abraham worships, so please lead me to a wife for his son ⁴³while I am here at the well. When a young woman comes out to get water, I'll ask her to give me a drink. ⁴⁴If she gives me a drink and

offers to get some water for my camels, I'll know she is the one you have chosen.”

⁴⁵ Even before I had finished praying, Rebekah came by with a water jar on her shoulder. When she had filled the jar, I asked her for a drink. ⁴⁶ She quickly lowered the jar from her shoulder and said, “Have a drink. Then I'll get water for your camels.” So I drank, and after that she got some water for my camels. ⁴⁷ I asked her who her father was, and she answered, “My father is Bethuel the son of Nahor and Milcah.” At once I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and gave thanks to the God my master Abraham worships. The Lord had led me straight to my master's relatives, and I had found a wife for his son.

⁴⁹ Now please tell me if you are willing to do the right thing for my master. Will you treat him fairly, or do I have to look for another young woman?

⁵⁸ They called her and asked, “Are you willing to leave with this man at once?”

“Yes,” she answered.

⁵⁹ So they agreed to let Rebekah and an old family servant woman leave immediately with Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰ They gave Rebekah their blessing and said, “We pray that God will give you many children and grandchildren and that he will help them defeat their enemies.” ⁶¹ Afterwards, Rebekah and the young women who were to travel with her prepared to leave. Then they got on camels and left with Abraham's servant and his men.

⁶² At that time Isaac was living in the southern part of Canaan near a place called “The Well of the Living One Who Sees Me.” ⁶³⁻⁶⁵ One evening he was walking out in the fields, when suddenly he saw a group of people approaching on camels. So he started toward them. Rebekah saw him coming; she got down from her camel, and asked, “Who is that man?”

“He is my master Isaac,” the servant answered. Then Rebekah covered her face with her veil.

⁶⁶ The servant told Isaac everything that had happened.

⁶⁷ Isaac took Rebekah into the tent where his mother had lived before she died, and Rebekah became his wife. He loved her and was comforted over the loss of his mother.



Thought for the week – Seeking divine guidance

Have you ever been entrusted with a huge piece of work you've never done before, and then left to do it with minimal guidance and no supervision? That's what happened to Abraham's servant. Let's see how he handled the situation.

First, we read just before today's passage that the servant clarified the task, getting as much information as he could from his master, Abraham. In the servant's concern to get the task right, he says in Genesis 24:39-40, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me'. But Abraham responds with some wonderfully reassuring words: 'The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful.'

Second, the servant was willing to set off, taking 10 camels and 'all kinds of choice gifts from his master' (Genesis 24:10), and trusting that God would guide and protect him along the way – a distance of about 500 miles – and give him success. We don't know how his journey took him to the town of Nahor, but, when he arrived at the well, he had a clear plan for discerning God's choice of a bride for Isaac. And he offers his plan to God in prayer: 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman

who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, “Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,” and who will say to me, “Drink, and I will draw for your camels also.” Let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master’s son.’ (Genesis 24:42-44)

It was an inspired idea, designed to elicit something of the girl’s character, never mind her appearance. In a hot climate, anyone would offer to draw water for a thirsty stranger, but it would take a very unusual and generous person to draw water for 10 thirsty camels! One camel can easily drink 25 gallons.

Third, the servant took time to consider whether this was indeed the right girl for the job. He waited for as long as it took for all the camels to finish drinking, and only then did he ask about her family. Imagine his joy when he realised that God had indeed answered his prayer and made his way successful! As he told Rebekah’s family, ‘I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son.’ (Genesis 24:48)

So, how might all this apply to our own questions about and struggles with divine guidance? First, there is clarifying the issue, best done in conversation with our Father in heaven, who loves to listen to our thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears. We also gather information and discuss our ideas and options with wise counsellors.

Then, perhaps before we feel ready, we need to make a move. We don’t yet know where our journey will take us, but God invites us to ‘step out in faith’, to trust God’s moment-by-moment guidance – rather as we might trust the directions we get from Google Maps. Usually, the technology offers several possible routes, and its recommendations change if the traffic situation alters. We may follow its first suggestion: if we deviate, it can usually accommodate our new choice. Occasionally, it asks us to ‘make a U-turn’. And so it can be with God: Often it doesn’t matter what path we take but, if we are ‘keeping in step with the Spirit’, we can trust him to retrieve the situation if we’re heading for a dead end.

The point is this: There's no easy way to know what the best option is; it depends on so many factors. For a Christian, it's about believing that what matters most to God is our willingness to trust him – as Abraham's servant trusted the angel – and to dare to 'walk by faith and not by sight'.

Then we will be able to conclude, like Abraham's faithful servant, 'As for me, the LORD has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin.' (Genesis 24:27)

A prayer of confession

Loving God, many times in our walk with you we come to decision crossroads. We have a choice: your way, or my way. Your way may look rocky and uneven, whereas my way may look smooth. Forgive us, loving God, for taking what appears to be the easy way. Your way is far more rewarding as we journey in your loving grace.

Assurance of forgiveness

Our Father is a God of love and wisdom. All our wrongdoings, all wrong decisions, have been forgiven through the gift of Jesus on the cross. Through his blood, God's own Son has paid all our debts, past, present and future. We are loved and forgiven. All thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

12 July – Choosing well

Isaac and Rebekah experience infertility before God grants them twins. There's a struggle between Esau and Jacob that starts in the womb and is stoked further by their parents' favouritism. Esau is tricked into giving up his inheritance for a bowl of Jacob's stew. As the different characters take and give up opportunities, we can question if they chose well. We explore the story and reflect on what we can learn about choosing well in our own lives.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 10 Year A

Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8.1-11; Matthew 13.1-9,18-23

The Birth of Esau and Jacob

¹⁹ Isaac was the son of Abraham, ²⁰ and he was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel. She was also the sister of Laban, the Aramean from northern Syria.

Almost 20 years later, ²¹ Rebekah still had no children. So Isaac asked the Lord to let her have a child, and the Lord answered his prayer.

²² Before Rebekah gave birth, she knew she was going to have twins, because she could feel them inside her, fighting each other. She thought, “Why is this happening to me?” Finally, she asked the Lord why her twins were fighting, ²³ and he told her:

“Your two sons will become
two separate nations.

The younger of the two
will be stronger,
and the older son
will be his servant.”

²⁴ When Rebekah gave birth, ²⁵ the first baby was covered with red hair, so he was named Esau. ²⁶ The second baby grabbed on to his brother's heel, so they named him Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when they were born.

Esau Sells His Rights as the First-Born Son

²⁷ As Jacob and Esau grew older, Esau liked the outdoors and became a good hunter, while Jacob lived the quiet life of a shepherd. ²⁸ Esau would take the meat of wild animals to his father Isaac, so Isaac loved him more, but Jacob was his mother's favourite son.

²⁹ One day, when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came home hungry ³⁰ and said, “I'm starving to death! Here and now give me some of that red stew!” That's how Esau got the name “Edom.”

³¹ Jacob replied, “Sell me your rights as the first-born son.”

³² “I'm about to die,” Esau answered. “What good will those rights do me?”

³³ But Jacob said, “Promise me your birthrights, here and now!” And that's what Esau did. ³⁴ Jacob then gave Esau some bread and some of the bean stew, and when Esau had finished eating and drinking, he

just got up and left, showing how little he thought of his rights as the first-born.

Thought for the week – When life's not fair

'It's not fair!' is the cry of small children everywhere, often when siblings are involved. Perhaps you remember being told 'Life isn't fair'. But did that help then, and does it help now? It seems to dismiss the validity of our deep sense of justice – things ought to be fair – and perhaps induces an attitude of fatalism: Why bother trying to fix things if they aren't ultimately fixable?

In today's story, we are faced with the massive injustice of God's choice of Jacob, the younger twin: 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger.' (v.23)

God's ways are inscrutable, as Job and Paul and many other Bible characters have concluded, and we are powerless before him: 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.' (Isaiah 55:8)

So perhaps we have to be pragmatic in choosing what to attempt to change or influence – that might include trying to prevent injustice in the first place. Isaac and Rebekah chose unjustly: 'Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.' (v.28)

There is definitely a warning for us here: in almost any role we're in, we may feel drawn to some individual(s) more than others, but we need to do our utmost not to practise favouritism. Perhaps surprisingly, the favoured one sometimes suffers the most – as in the case of Jacob's own favouritism towards Joseph.

We are then faced with two pivotal choices: the deliberate injustice of Jacob's trickery, and the stupid and irresponsible behaviour of Esau. We note the cunning, considered calculation of Jacob, and the reckless and ill-considered response of Esau. Neither are

commendable. Perhaps both can offer us some pointers as we learn to choose well.

First, Jacob, the relatively powerless younger brother, decides to use what power he has to manipulate the situation in order to gain the upper hand. We don't know if he was aware of the prophecy Rebekah had received but, if so, he decided to 'play God' by attempting to bring about its fulfilment himself. In an unconsciously prophetic action, he emerged from the womb 'gripping Esau's heel' (v.26). He grew up with the compulsion to grasp that which was his to receive: an illustration, perhaps, of the New Testament tension between salvation by works and salvation by grace.

Do we sometimes make the same mistake, trying to play God rather than seeking his wisdom or being willing to wait for God to act in his own time?

Second, the privileged and potentially powerful older brother, who should, as the firstborn son, have been taking his role, responsibilities and rights seriously, 'despised his birthright' (v.34). Why? Because he was driven by his physical appetite, choosing the instant gratification of his material needs over the ancestral gift of being the firstborn. Interestingly, the tempting of Esau was seen by medieval expositors as a typology of the temptation of Christ.

There are at least two life lessons here. First, the importance of not making quick decisions when we are hungry, tired, stressed, angry, hurried, etc. Don't go shopping when you're hungry, and don't write emails when you're angry! Be careful to consider the long-term consequences of short-term choices.

The second life lesson is the importance of clarifying what's most valuable to us and constantly refocusing so that it becomes our guiding principle in every decision. For most people, the relational and the spiritual come first – not achievements or material things. Whereas Esau gave up his future and legacy in a moment of

distraction from what was important, how are we ensuring our day-by-day choices keep us on the path God has for us?



A prayer of adoration

Lord God, you are full of blessing and faithfulness: as shown in your promise to Isaac and Rebekah; as shown in your Son, Jesus, whom we choose to follow; as shown in your Holy Spirit, residing in and with us.

You are God, full of blessing and honour, continuing to promise much today.

Even if we must wait a while, you are faithful, your timeline is not ours. As we wait, we hold close your blessings and promises, treasuring them as you treasure us.

We cherish, honour, and adore you. Amen

19 July – God is in this place

Jacob is alone and on the run, having deceived his father and stolen Esau's birthright and blessing. As he rests for the night, Jacob dreams of a ladder, connecting heaven with earth. Jacob realises that he has encountered God in this spot and marks the place, naming it Bethel. Today, we explore what it means to know God's presence, even in the midst of troubles and anxieties. And how God's presence can make all the difference to our lives.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 11 Year A

Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-12,23-24; Romans 8.12-25;
Matthew 13.24-30,36-43

Genesis 28:10-19a [CEV]

Jacob's Dream at Bethel

¹⁰ Jacob left the town of Beersheba and started out for Haran. ¹¹ At sunset he stopped for the night and went to sleep, resting his head on a large rock. ¹² In a dream he saw a ladder that reached from earth to heaven, and God's angels were going up and down on it.

¹³ The Lord was standing beside the ladder and said:

I am the Lord God who was worshiped by Abraham and Isaac. I will give to you and your family the land on which you are now sleeping.

¹⁴ Your descendants will spread over the earth in all directions and will become as numerous as the specks of dust. Your family will be a blessing to all people. ¹⁵ Wherever you go, I will watch over you, then later I will bring you back to this land. I won't leave you – I will do all I have promised.

¹⁶ Jacob woke up suddenly and thought, “The Lord is in this place, and I didn't even know it.” ¹⁷ Then Jacob became frightened and said, “What a frightening place! It must be the house of God and the gateway to heaven.”

¹⁸ When Jacob got up early the next morning, he took the rock that he had used for a pillow and stood it up as a place of worship. Then he poured olive oil on the rock to dedicate it to God, ¹⁹ and he named the place Bethel. Before that it had been named Luz.



Thought for the week – Are you listening?

Most of us enjoy our home comforts, our TV shows and our hobbies. Recent research showed that an average person in the UK watches four hours a day of TV and video content (including videos on a phone or computer). Advertisers compete to place their adverts during the most-watched TV shows (30 seconds during *Coronation Street* can cost around £350,000) because they know that this is where our attention is focused.

Jacob has an intense encounter with God at the point where he has left his home and is travelling with next to nothing. He fears for his life and is unsure what the future holds – he needs to hear from God. Many of us who come to church express a desire to hear from God, but perhaps we don't need him to speak to us in the way Jacob did. When we are comfortable and our attention is elsewhere, it can be difficult to be aware of God. Perhaps, if we were to fast from some of our entertainment, turning off our TV and phone for a while, we might be more likely to hear God's voice. Suppose we deliberately avoid distracting ourselves from the situations that play on our minds. Might we be more open to hearing God reminding us of his promises and directing us in where we should go next?

Why not choose an evening this week and deliberately fast from television, web browsing and phone scrolling? Instead, you could read some Bible verses or use a spiritual practice such as the examen. Tell God what you are thinking about and take time to write down the thoughts that come to mind in the space that follows. You could also take paper and pen to bed and write down any dreams that speak into your prayers as you wake up. God meets us when we seek him.

Prayers of intercession

Merciful God, you call us and challenge us to live in the world, to be part of the world, to belong the world and now for the world we bring our prayers.

We pray for the world's people who go hungry though failure of crops, through bad land management or climate change, flood and drought,

heat and cold, through the greed of others, through lack of money and resources. We pray for those who offer training and support to train others in food and farming, for those who run soup kitchens and food banks.

We pray for those who hunger for more than food, for those who are hungry for love, care, support and shelter. For those who are hungry for justice and fairness, dignity and worth.

We pray for those who are hungry for peace and stability, security and safety. We pray for those who fear the enemy who walks with them, who lives among them, who tries to influence and change them.

We pray for children and young people, being brought up in a digital age where good and bad, truth and falsehood, right and wrong seem hard to navigate with so much on-line influence. For those who see the world as a frightening uncertain place and wonder how they will step out and navigate it themselves.

We pray for ourselves that we may tread the world carefully and seek what is right and good and truthful. We pray that we may be the scatterer of good deeds and words, kind thoughts and love in action.

We pray that we may do our best each step of the way, that we may be the best followers of Jesus that we can be, that we may seek and find the Kingdom of God.

And in a moment of stillness, we offer our unspoken prayers for ourselves and others ...

Merciful and loving God, hear our prayers. Amen

26 July – Navigating the mess

Jacob agrees to work for his uncle Laban to marry his youngest daughter, Rachel. After the seven years are up, Laban tricks Jacob by having him marry Rachel's older sister, Leah – perhaps to ensure that she is honoured according to local customs. Jacob agrees to a further seven years of work to ensure that he can marry Rachel too.

Today's passages help us remember that God understands life is and will be messy. We might not be able to escape the mess, but we can learn to navigate it with God. It might not always be obvious, but God

is working in the midst of the mess to bring good out of tricky situations.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 12 Year A

Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11,45b; Romans 8.26-39; Matthew 13.31-33,44-52

Genesis 29:15-28 [CEV}

¹⁵ Laban said to him, “You shouldn't have to work without pay, just because you are a relative of mine. What do you want me to give you?”

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ Laban had two daughters. Leah was older than Rachel, but her eyes didn't sparkle, while Rachel was beautiful and had a good figure. ¹⁸ Since Jacob was in love with Rachel, he answered, “If you will let me marry Rachel, I'll work seven years for you.”

¹⁹ Laban replied, “It's better for me to let you marry Rachel than for someone else to have her. So stay and work for me.” ²⁰ Jacob worked seven years for Laban, but the time seemed like only a few days, because he loved Rachel so much.

²¹ Jacob said to Laban, “The time is up, and I want to marry Rachel now!” ²² So Laban gave a big feast and invited all their neighbours. ²³ But that evening he brought Leah to Jacob, who married her and spent the night with her. ²⁴ Laban also gave Zilpah to Leah as her servant woman.

²⁵ The next morning Jacob found out that he had married Leah, and he asked Laban, “Why did you do this to me? Didn't I work to get Rachel? Why did you trick me?”

²⁶ Laban replied, “In our country the older daughter must get married first. ²⁷ After you spend this week with Leah, you may also marry Rachel. But you will have to work for me another seven years.”

²⁸⁻³⁰ At the end of the week of celebration, Laban let Jacob marry Rachel, and he gave her his servant woman Bilhah. Jacob loved Rachel more than he did Leah, but he had to work another seven years for Laban.

Thought for the week – Messy justice

Who do you identify with most in this story from Genesis? Jacob? Laban? Leah or Rachel? With Jacob as the main character we have followed from his father's house, it can be tempting to see him as the one being cheated with the 'wrong' daughter being brought to him after the feast and having to work those extra seven years to earn Rachel's hand. However, Laban explains his deceit by explaining that, if Jacob married Rachel before Leah was wed, Leah would be seen by other men as rejected and spoiled. It was culturally unheard of for the younger daughter to be married ahead of an older one. Laban's deception preserves Leah's dignity and gives her hope of a life with purpose and financial security. Laban obscured the truth of his daughter's identity at the wedding feast, but he secured justice for her.

Standing up for justice can feel like a messy subject. Throughout the years, civil disobedience has been put forward as an appropriate response to unfair structures in society and yet action of civil disobedience can cause consternation and raise questions of who it is ok to inconvenience. For example, environmental activists have come under much criticism for blocking roads that may stop ambulances from getting through to hospitals.

But God also calls us to work against injustice. When it's complicated and messy, we are more aware of needing the Spirit's guiding to help us navigate the right action. Perhaps we should start by reflecting on the situations we are involved in to make sure that we are not unthinkingly perpetuating injustice on others and ask God's guidance for how to respond.



A prayer of thanks and praise

Father, you looked upon the hearts of your people.

You saw our messy, chaotic lives and loved us enough to send your Son, Jesus.

Father, we give you thanks and praise.

Jesus, you came, a treasure from heaven to walk this earth, teaching and serving before suffering, for the love of those you came to save.

Jesus, we give you thanks and praise.

Holy Spirit, through Jesus, you reside in and with us.

You remind, prompt and help us with all that we need to navigate our days in integrity and love.

Spirit, we give you thanks and praise. Amen

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