



**First Church of Christ in Mansfield  
(Congregational) United Church of Christ**

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All the Members, Ministers

Rev. Joseph Blotz, Pastor + Erik Haeger,

Organist Olivia Russell, Worship Circle

Coordinator

**THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME + JULY 16, 2023**

**Chimes and Prelude**

**Welcome and Greeting**

**Centering in the Spirit**

*Jacob and Esau*

Padraig O

Tuama One day I repented my resentment because I realised I'd forgotten to repeat it.

For a while—no, for a long while—it was like a prayer,  
rising to the skies, morning after morning, like a siren that wouldn't quiet.

And then I remembered other things:  
the way I walk lighter these days;  
the way you never knew my story of divorce; the  
way I am tired of being forced among the new;  
and the way I miss having someone to speak to about things I don't need to explain; the way  
we shared a name.

So I decided.

I took a flight and hung around the areas where we used to meet.

I loitered with intent.

I was hungry with hope but couldn't eat alone.

I missed the home your body was, even though we're grown now, I  
missed your smell, your wrestle, your snoring breath.

And when I saw you, I saw you'd changed too.

So much behind us we didn't need to name.

**Hymn**

*As Grain on Scattered Hillsides*

CH491

**Confessing our Brokenness and Opening Prayer**

Hear these words from the Gospel according to Matthew: Jesus said, That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

When in this past week have we found it difficult to listen?  
When have we not been good soil for the seeds God is planting in our hearts?

*Silence*

**O God of mercy, in Jesus Christ you freed us from sin and death, and by your Holy Spirit you nourish us with life. Plant us now in good soil, that our lives may flower in righteousness and peace. Amen.**

**Song of Praise**

*Gloria*

Christopher Grundy

Glo - ry to the Cre-a - tor, and the Christ, and the Spir-it so near, as it  
9  
was from the start so it shall be for - ev-er one God, al-ways here.

**Christian Scripture**

Romans 8:1-11

With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.

God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that.

The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it. And now what the law code asked for but we couldn't deliver is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us. Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn't pleased at being ignored.

But if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God's terms. It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus),

you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's!

**Psalter**

Psalm 119:1-8

CH759

**Hebrew Scripture**

Genesis 25:19-34

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents.

Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

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Now these are the begettings of Yitzhak, son of Avraham. Avraham begot Yitzhak. Yitzhak was forty years old when he took Rivka daughter of Betuel the Aramean, from the country of Aram, sister of Lavan the Aramean, for himself as a wife. Yitzhak entreated Yhwh on behalf of his wife, for she was barren, and Yhwh granted-his-entreaty: Rivka his wife became pregnant. But the children almost crushed one another inside her, so she said: If this be so, why do I exist? And she went to inquire of Yhwh. Yhwh said to her: Two nations are in your body, two tribes from your belly shall be divided; tribe shall be mightier than tribe, elder shall be servant to younger! When her days were fulfilled for bearing, here: twins were in her body! The first one came out ruddy, like a hairy mantle all over, so they called his name: Esav/Rough-One. After that his brother came out, his hand grasping Esav's heel, so they called his name: Yaakov/Heel-Holder. Yitzhak was sixty years old when she bore them. The lads grew up: Esav became a man who knew the hunt, a man of the field, but Yaakov was a plain man, staying among the tents. Yitzhak grew to love Esav, for (he brought) hunted- game for his mouth, but Rivka loved Yaakov. Once Yaakov was boiling boiled-stew, when Esav came in from the field, and he was weary. Esav said to Yaakov: Pray give me a gulp of the red-stuff, that red-stuff, for I am so weary! Therefore they called his name: Edom/Red- One. Yaakov said: Sell me your firstborn-right here-and-now. Esav said: Here, I am on my way to dying, so what good to me is a firstborn-right? Yaakov said: Swear to me here-and- now. He swore to him and sold his firstborn-right to Yaakov. Yaakov gave Esav bread and boiled lentils; he ate and drank and arose and went off. Thus did Esav despise the firstborn- right.

**Reflection**

**Rev. Joseph Blotz**

There is a familiar saying, "No person ever steps into the same river twice for it is not the same river and they are not the same person." I believe the same is true of Scripture... no one can read the same passage of Scripture the same way twice for we, the reader, have changed and grown since last we read it. And sometimes, through translation or commentary or discovery of earlier and better

source texts, the actual text can change too. The last time I grappled with this reading would have been the summer of 2017, a point at which I had not yet adopted twin siblings. Now, six years in, I can say I have a new appreciation for, and reading of, these stories of Jacob and Esau... more compassion for Esau... more questions of Jacob... more sympathy for their parents to a point...

For, there is something unique about twins... growing in the womb together, each other's constant companion and rival and comfort... As I have witnessed it, twins can be both each other's best and closest friend, as well as their greatest and most oppositional enemy. And I relate to this text in a particular way too because, like Esau and Jacob, my twins could not be most different... in terms of looks and temperament and interests, they are complete opposites.

But, I am jumping ahead a bit, because our story does not begin with the births of Jacob and Esau, but with the marriage of their mother, Rebekah, to their father, Isaac. Not wanting his son to marry a foreign woman, Abraham sends a servant to the home of Sarah's cousins, to choose a bride from among their extended family. Praying for a sign from God to help him find Isaac's future partner, the servant meets Rebekah at a well, where she offers to water his camels. Soon, the father is met, a proposal is made, and Rebekah makes the journey back to Abraham's camp where she and Isaac move into the deceased Sarah's tent.

But, as is the case for each of the ancestors of Israel, the newly wed couple struggles to conceive. The interesting this is, it doesn't seem to bother Rebekah. Whereas Sarah anguished over not having a child, Rebekah is not at all vexed. She appears secure in her sense of self, her position within the family, and her perception by the wider world. Isaac, however, is tormented. The text says he "pleads" with the Lord, imploring God to grant them a child. God hears Isaac's pleas and doubles the offering... Rebekah conceives twins. Yet, from the moment their arms and legs take shape, the children growing within her womb are fighting... wrestling, kicking, struggling within her. Now, she cries out to God, "Why me?" she shouts. And the Lord responds that there are two nations, two peoples, at war within her and that the normal birth order will be reversed; the older will serve the younger.

When the time comes for Rebekah to give birth, Esau is born first strong, dark, and hairy. And Jacob comes fast behind, gripping onto his brother's heel earning him the name, well, heel... Ya'aqob from 'aqeb. And, as they grow up, those differences remain... Esau is an outdoor boy, hunting and stalking and playing in the fields. Jacob stays close to home, spending his days in the tent, close to his mama. So special bonds develop... Isaac closer to Esau, Rebekah favoring Jacob... a recipe for rivalry and hurt and disaster.

We can read of this growing tension even in the ways they begin to speak and think of one another. The day Esau trades his birthright for a bowl of stew, Jacob describes him in very unflattering terms. He is pictured as demanding and animal like, gulping down stew, so consumed with his basest instincts that he does not even stop to consider the gravity of the decision he is about to make. And Jacob does not come off looking much better, putting his own interests above the basic needs of his brother, taking advantage of his hunger and need to eat.

This story begs of me the question, how is it that we treat those we struggle? How do we view and think about and interact with those who we have difficult relationships with? Do we judge them to be

less than we ourselves are... less intelligent... less insightful... in even small ways, less human... Do we take advantage of weaknesses? Do we place our own wants above their needs? How do these dynamics and considerations shift when we move them from the personal to the communal to the national to the global? How then do we honor and live with those with whom we struggle?

This is only the beginning of Jacob and Esau's story, one rooted in rivalry and parental preference, in personality and lack of consideration... it was a story told to explain the animosity between the people of Israel and their neighbors the Edomites... the reasons for war and hostility, for animosity and for hatred. But it also begs of us, is there another way? Is this the only way?

### Call to Prayer

*Lord Listen to Your Children Praying*

CH305

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 2/2 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody is simple and hymn-like. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Lord, li-sten to your chi - ldren pray - ing. Lord, send your Spi-rit in this place.

9 Lord, lis-ten to your chi - ldren pray - ing. Sendus love, sendus power, sendus grace.

### Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus

Gracious God, your love has been sown in many ways and places. We pray for newly planted congregations around the world. Inspire us by their witness to the faith we share. Creating God, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in praise. We pray for the birds and animals who make their home in the trees, and for lands stripped bare by deforestation. Empower us to sustainably use what you have given.

Reigning God, we pray for our nation's leaders. Increase their desire for justice and equality. We pray for our enemies. Bridge the chasms that divide us and guide authorities to a deep and lasting peace.

Abiding God, care for all who are in need. For those who are doubting, renew faith. For those who are worrying, provide release. For those who are struggling, ease burdens. For those in fear, give hope.

Renewing God, revive your church in this place. Nourish and nurture the seeds you have planted, that we might grow as disciples. Replace what has been depleted. Sustain our ministries and deepen relationships with the wider community.

Eternal God, we give thanks for all who have died. Comfort us in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Hear us, O God.

*Please pray the Prayer of Jesus in whatever language is most comfortable for you.*

*The following are offered as examples...*

**Our Father/Mother/Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.**

**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread,**

**and forgive us our debts/sins/trespases**

**as we forgive our debtors/those who sin/trespass against us. And**

**lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

**Musical Offering**

*O Word of God Incarnate*

CH322

*Financial offerings may be placed in the collection plates,  
mailed to: First Church of Christ in Mansfield UCC. Box 36. Mansfield Center, CT 06250, or given  
online at [www.myfcc.info](http://www.myfcc.info)*

**Doxology**

Praise God from whom all bless - ings flow; Praise God all crea-tures here be low; Praise  
5 God for all that love has done: Cre - a - tor, Christ and Spi - rit, One. A - men!

**Prayer of Dedication**

**God of all goodness and grace, receive the gifts we offer; and grant that our  
whole lives may give you glory and praise. Amen.**

**Hymn**

*Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer*

CH622

**Benediction**

**Postlude**

**The Week Ahead...**

Sunday, June 16	10:15am Worship and Worship Circle Coffee Hour Host Training following Worship 5pm PFLAG in Fellowship Hall
Monday, July 17	10am First Church Leads Worship at St Joseph Center
Tuesday, July 18	3:15pm First Church Leads Worship at MCNR
Thursday, July 20	12:15pm Contemplative Communion in Yellow Office
Sunday, June 23	10:15am Worship and Worship Circle