

## A Bend in the Road

By Rev. Tanya Sadagopan

July 24, 2011

*Genesis 29:15-28 and Romans 8:28*

### Continuing on the Journey

The last two weeks we have been traveling with Jacob as he sets out on his journey and learns about the Yahweh, the God of his fathers. Will Jacob the trickster inherit the promise that God made to Abraham and Isaac? He seems an unlikely character to fulfill the promises of God. Or is he?

The Jacob story is rich. His relationship with God develops over time. Jacob learns to trust in Yahweh and the blessings in store for him. He has yet to discover exactly what it means; *You are blessed to be a blessing.*"

### We are Climbing Jacob's ladder

We sing *We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder* to remind us that Jacob's walk with God was not about a destination – about getting somewhere, it is rather a journey of faith. In this hymn we never arrive, we are always climbing higher, and higher. Jacob's journey is about God's promises and blessings. Yet, Jacob's journey is filled with family conflict and deception, challenges and trials. He tricks his father and brother and then runs away from home. On the road he meets God in his dream and sees the ladder of angels. Jacob remembers what God said...

*Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to the land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. Genesis 28:15.*

And this vision is the proof that God is with him! He sets out on a new path, with confidence, knowing that God is with him. Verse 1 in Chapter 29 reads, "Then Jacob went on his journey" yet the original Hebrew means so much more. After Jacob encounters God, the Hebrew states, *Jacob lifts his feet*. This is the only time we will see this phrase in the Bible. It means that he sets out on his journey with determination and confidence. Can't you see him on the road talking to himself? "I can do this. God is with me. I will find a wife. I will make a life."

Then in today's reading we see he finds a wife, meets his Uncle Laban and he gives Jacob a job. Even though he has no money for a dowry, no gifts of fine cloth or gold bangles, Laban still welcomes Jacob. They strike a bargain. Jacob promises to serve Laban for 7 years for his daughter Rachel.

You can hear Jacob thinking, "No dowry? No problem! Things are working out! No more Esau, no more worries. My past is behind me, my future is before me. God is with me! My way is clear. My path is set. My life begins in 7 years and then I will have the woman of my dreams."

And the story goes that Jacob marries the love of his life and they start out on living happily ever after...right? Yes, right up to the point when he wakes up and sees under the veil that it is not the woman of his dreams, it is her elder sister, Leah. Uncle Laban tricked him.

Scripture tells us Jacob says to Uncle Laban, *What is this you have done to me? Why have you deceived me?* The trickster is tricked. I wonder if these are the same thoughts of his brother Esau when Jacob tricked him out of his birthright, and of his father Isaac when Jacob deceived him by dressing up like his brother to get his blessing?

I imagine Jacob yelling at God... “This is not what I had planned!”

### **A Bend in the Road**

My sermon today is entitled, *A Bend in the Road* precisely because we are just like Jacob, surprised with life not turning out the way we planned. The climbing gets tough. Rather than being a straight forward road with all the steps along the way planned out, it is difficult. Our journey of faith is much more like climbing a mountain, filled with twists and turns, slow going, and unexpected bends in the road along the way.

The trickery continues...Laban says to Jacob, you can still have Rachel too, but you must labor for me another 7 years! 14 years of hard work for his plan to begin to work out. This will take much longer than he thought.

### **A Training Period**

You might say that God has a lot of work to do with Jacob...how do you take this guy and turn him into a blessing, a recipient of the Promised Land? TRAIN HIM! So you might say during this 14 year period, God is training Jacob to be faithful and how to learn to trust in Yahweh the God of his fathers.

If you want to have a mountain top experience, you better learn how to climb. If you are going to be a blessing to others, you better learn how to trust God, through good times and bad. Unfortunately, the easy road won't get you there.

### **A Journey to Muir Woods**

My family recently took a trip to see Muir Woods – the giant redwood trees of California. Everyone said it was close to downtown San Francisco. No one told me you had to climb two mountains to get there. You see, I am afraid of heights and traveling up a mountain means that the road twists and turns all along the edge of the mountain. I found myself afraid every time we came to a bend in the road. You can't see around it, you don't know who will be coming toward you. At times the road narrowed to one lane, each side of the road taking turns to make a sharp turn in the mountain path. This was not what I thought the way to Muir Woods was going to be.

Climbing mountains is hard work, it is slow going, and you must take care at each bend in the road. Not everyone can do it. Not every car can make it up.

### **An Iron Man**

I know a guy who doesn't need a car to climb a mountain. He is my friend Bill, the Iron Man. He can run up mountains. He has 0% body fat. He burns more calories sitting on the couch than we do when we are exercising. For him, mountain climbing is easy. Why? Because he had trained for it – for the last 14 years he has been training to run the most grueling difficult races anyone has run. It takes time, patience, building up endurance, learning how to deal with injuries, altitude changes, and surprises around the bend. He continues to persevere, setting a new goal for himself each year, making a training plan, and then he works hard to accomplish it. Twists and turns in the plan do not throw him off course.

### **Twists and Turns in Our Life**

We often face twists and turns in our own lives. Divorce, job losses, new bosses, troubled kids, ailing parents, cancer diagnoses, home foreclosures, and failing economies. These are never in our plan. Who we are, and how we handle it when life throws us a curve ball says a lot about our own faith journey.

When there is a bend in the road, do we say, “OK God, this is great training in my faith journey. Thanks for the opportunity. Help me be patient and learn how to be a blessing to others. Bring on the problems.

*Bring on the conflicts. I am ready, because You God are with me all along the way!"* No. We don't think that way do we? Rather we are apt to say, *"THIS was NOT in my plan!"*  
I can't do this, I can't climb this mountain, it is too high, too hard.  
I can't do this because I tried already and I fell down.  
I can't do this because I am afraid of what will happen.

We are often stopped by the very challenges that are designed to strengthen our faith.

### **Paul tell us in Romans 8**

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to God's purpose.

All things work together for good...all things. New jobs, new bosses, new trials, new challenges, new surprising bends in the road bring unexpected blessings – a stronger faith.

Remember Christ Immanuel at Christmas is the same one who is with us now – through it all. God is with us throughout our faith journey, training us to be a blessing.

### **A Bend in the Road brings an Unexpected Blessing**

After we climbed those two mountains, my family walked all through Muir Wood along the babbling brook weaving in and out of the majestic redwood trees of God's amazing creation. I took photographs all along the way that inspired me and reminded me of the awesomeness of our Creator. Just as we were getting ready to head home, when our daughter was crying for food, and our son wanted to get back to the car, we saw a sharp turn leading up to a new trail that climbed the mountain. We paused, should we climb higher? We took that upward trail and after an unexpected bend in the path I saw the most amazing sight, the rays of the sun shining through the redwood trees. I took the most beautiful photo of my life...*the bulletin cover.*



When you experience Grace like this in your life – when you see God at work in the midst of your challenges, you learn to trust in God.

Just like Jacob we are given a promise though Jesus.  
We are called to continue his journey of love and redemption.  
We are in training so that we may be blessed to be a blessing.  
It won't be easy.

Keep on Climbing, you never know – just around the corner might come the biggest blessing you have ever seen. Amen.