

## **St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church**

*traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatami and Ojibwe.*

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### **Worship This Week May 5, 2024**

**SCRIPTURE INTRO** – Jacob escaped from his father-in-law. But Laban caught up with him and accused him of kidnapping his daughters and grandchildren. Laban's real concern was the fact that he had become wealthy only because God had blessed Jacob. In a powerful speech, Jacob called Laban out – how he faithfully worked like a slave for 20 years, always taking the high road even though his father cheated him and changed the rules 10 times. Laban was convicted and condemned. He knew it.

**SCRIPTURE** – Genesis 31:43-44

**MESSAGE** – Imagine you take a business loan from a bank. You get \$100,000 in startup money and within a short period of time it's completely repaid with interest. The business prospers and is worth several million dollars. Six years later, the bank shows up and claims ownership or at least takes complete credit for your success – not taking into account that it was your idea, your plan, your hard work that made it happen. Laban's statement that "everything you see is mine" was more than bold – it was delusional. Laban was not a success on his own. It was only when Jacob arrived that he did OK. And yet had the nerve to suggest that because he provided the seed money for Jacob's flock, he actually owned it. And it provided further proof that with some people, the truth is what they want to believe. It's a reminder of one of the rules of spiritual warfare: if the rules don't work in your favour, you change them.

**SCRIPTURE:** Gen 31:44-50

**MESSAGE** – A covenant is an agreement between two sides. In the Bible, there are two types. First is the covenant between God and his people in general or with specific individuals. There's the one with Noah: "I will never again destroy all living things. As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night." (Gen 8:21-22). With Abraham: "I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen. 12:2-3). And with Moses: "Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me" (Exodus 19:5). Those are the three main ones. Then there are covenants on a human level, between two people, such as a marriage covenant, or families as with Labans and Jacobs. Both men called the stones a

“witness pile.” The stones were to be a memorial or reminder of the agreement. They agreed on that. But each of them was agreeing to something different. Read on.

**SCRIPTURE** – Gen 31:51-53

**MESSAGE** – In Jacob’s mind, the covenant was a boundary line. Boundaries are good things. They are healthy. We need boundaries in every area of our lives. It was clear to Jacob – and Rachel and Leah – that their father and his father in law could not be trusted. They set up a pillar to be a barrier between them. Sometimes, good neighbour relations require a good fence or hedge row or clear boundary marker. There is wisdom in having some separation from in-laws. Recall God’s command regarding marriage in Genesis 2:34 that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.” The key word is “leave.” Even if they reside on the same property or compound, they need to have separate dwellings. Again, a healthy arrangement which respects individuality, privacy and the fact that each generation is a bit different than the previous. It was about peaceful coexistence. Laban, however, understood the covenant as something different. It was more of an agreement between two nations at war. It focused on the negative: “I will never pass this pile of stones to harm you, and you must never pass these stones or this monument to harm me.” It had a threatening tone: if you ever cross the line, “I call on the God of our ancestors—the God of your grandfather Abraham and the God of my grandfather Nahor—to serve as a judge between us.” Serve as a judge means, “to destroy.”

**SCRIPTURE** – Gen 31:53-54

**MESSAGE** – They said their goodbyes. This might be the last time Jacob would see his inlaws. Rachel and Leah would likely never see their family of origin again. It was a good thing in their minds because as we saw in earlier scripture, they finally saw the light and realized how Laban was a walking disaster area and how Jacob was part of something wonderful – God’s unfolding Kingdom on Earth. We don’t hear anything more about Laban in scripture either. Good riddance. Laban is of the world, and Jacob needed to be freed from this world in order to live wholeheartedly for the God of his fathers. Again we witness a divided family. Divided nations, actually, because the sons of Jacob and his wives would be the start of the 12 tribes of Israel. Division is not a concept we like to glorify. We’re not supposed to be divided. Civil war is ugly. But sometimes, it’s necessary for something better to come about. The American Civil War resulted in the end of slavery. And what are we to make of Jesus’ prayer in the Gospel of John Chapter 17 that his prayer was for his people to be one. “May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me” (John 17:23). Unfortunately, that’s never been the case. Right from the start, church people fought over all sorts of issues. On a human level such mundane things as what to eat and what to wear. On a deeper level, who was Christ (human, God or both) and what

parts of the old Jewish laws we had to continue, if any. The church was one body until 1054 – when the Eastern Orthodox wing was created. It split again during the 1500s under John Calvin, with Dutch Reformed churches in northern Europe and the Presbyterian church in Scotland. The reformed churches themselves split into small branches over theology and practice. In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, we saw the creation of Living Stones a few years ago from a small group of Biblical believers who didn't want to be part of a denomination which was increasingly guided by secular values rather than scripture. We'll get an idea in the next few months how many congregations are formally departing under the new process for those who are not pleased with liberal theology. I also wonder what Jesus understood when he said the words "such perfect unity." Unity is easy to understand – it's the concept of one. We are all on the same page. But the Lord qualified that with the word "perfect." Think about that. The human race is far from perfect. That's human nature, which Jesus understood and accepted. God alone is perfect. What Jesus wanted was for us to be one with Him, be united in Him, which means being submitted to Him and His Holy Word. Unity, therefore is not with each other but first and primarily with Him. Any unity on a human level only happens when we are connected with others who are similarly in unity with Him. Kindred souls, I like to call them. True brothers and sisters. True family, with God as our Holy Parent. In that sense, I have more in common with my friends in Living Stones than with most ministers in the Presbyterian church. I haven't departed because God isn't calling me to do so. God wants me to remain as a living witness to Biblical truth until such time I am called to leave. That may be never, I don't know. And I'm not alone in that. I have kindred souls remaining in the Presbyterian fold.

Back to the Bible. Rachel and Leah could not divorce themselves from their corrupt father. But they made a choice to be allied to their husband, who was clearly walking in unity with God, his true Father, with the pre-incarnate Christ as his brother and the Holy Spirit giving him the words, showing him the way, protecting him on the road and doing the heavy lifting. He will need all of that in the days to come when he is reunited with his brother and returns to the homeland. In the same way parents want their adult children to get along and remain as friends, God does not want us to fight. But God wants us to remember what is most important. The connection with Him, obedience to Him, submission to Him is more important than peace with each other. Proof of that is how Jesus butted heads with the religious leaders of his day and went to the cross rather than play their games. Jesus actually said, "I did not come to bring peace to this world." He fully expected that if we are in sync with God, we will attract enemies here on earth.

It's why we Trust in the LORD with all our heart and strive not to depend on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). When we Trust in the LORD and do good, we will live safely in the land and prosper (Psalm 37:3). Amen

## **NEW PRAYER**

1. Condolences to Sarah Sonneveld after the passing of her grandfather Mike Mazan.
2. Thanks that Colin Paterson has successfully completed therapy; pray for a good diagnostic test at the end of May.
3. Bruce Stephens back in hospital (Petrolia – a good place!) to treat infection, hopefully just for the week. Pray that he recovers so he can get started on more treatments in London.
4. Mark Labadie's sister Darlene Lunn recovering at home.

## **CONTINUE TO PRAY**

Health and healing –

1. Betty and Bruce Bradley, Becky Desjardine, Margaret Follows, Fran Jackin, Ron Mason, Bette Northcott, Karen Northcott, Tom O'Neill, Cherie Pegg, Sandra Pegg, Ellen Robinson, Julie Shaw, Bruce & Cathy Stephens, Sandra Whitson
2. Anyone seeking or undergoing treatment for addictions
3. Anyone wrestling with anxiety and depression

Shut ins – Dianne Richards at Wallaceburg Retirement Residence, Jim Lusk at Oaks Wallaceburg, Lane Douglas and Ross Fuchs at Fairfield Park in Wallaceburg, Aubrey Butler at home.

Elders on session – Mark Labadie 519-359-4842, Cindy Brewer 519-683-4113, Sheila Eves 519-683-4148, Andrew Neely 519-359-8903, Mark Richards 519-809-9175 and Julie Shaw 226-627-1953, Bob Vriesema 519-401-8056.

Board of managers – Wendy Weston (chair), Levi Bergsma, Will Brewer, Linda Malott, Jenn Mason, Nicole Neely, Von Parking, Mark Richards, Jodie Rich, Bob Vriesema and Mike Wicks.

## **WHAT'S UP:**

- Please keep using the current donation envelopes for the year 2025 – they all have their donation number on them and we are going to ignore the dates that are on them. The donation will be processed the day they are received.
- Weekly email – Send announcements and new info to [standrewspcdresden@gmail.com](mailto:standrewspcdresden@gmail.com)
- Free Community Meals – Please share this info with anyone in need: North Dresden Community Church – first Wednesday of each month at 5:30 p.m.  
Dresden Christian Reformed Church – second Wednesday of each month at 5:30 p.m.

## **DATES**

May 7 – 7 p.m. Session

May 8 – 7 p.m. Final Bible study at Evangel. 1 John (letter from John).

May 12 – Guest preacher Rev. Lillian Wilton. Study week Sunday off for Rev. Andy.