Living Hope
Christian Reformed Church
Belong • Believe • Bless

Sunday, August 16, 2026

Speaker: Pastor John Vanderwindt
Scripture: Genesis 30:25-31:55
Sermon Title: Trusting God at His Word
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What a great reminder for us as we come to the Lord that it is with thanksgiving that He has made Himself known to us. And as we look at the book of Genesis, we see how God has made Himself known to the people during the book of Genesis, but also how God works through them and how God provides and how God keeps His Word.

As we read today's passage, it's a little bit of a long one, but I'm going to read through it because I think the story itself is something which we need to remember. And then I will touch base on some thoughts afterwards. So I invite you to turn to ***Genesis 30*** and we're going to start at verse 25 and read right through ***Genesis 31***.

This is the last that we will hear of Laban, who is Rachel and Leah's father. We do not read of Laban afterwards anymore, as this is the story where they leave. Just to bring us up to date, for those of us who are new to this piece, we have gone through Isaac and Esau and Jacob as Isaac and Rebekah's children.

Esau and Jacob had a squabble, and Jacob fled. And as Jacob fled, in ***Genesis 28***, we saw the story of Jacob going to bed with his head on a pillow. And he has this vision. And in this vision, God says to him, *"I will bring you back to this land that I have promised you, and I will be with you."*

And Jacob goes on further to Haran, and there he meets Rachel and falls in love with her. He plans to marry Rachel after working for seven years. And Laban has a different plan. And so Jacob ends up marrying Leah. Then he marries Rachel and works another seven years to pay that off. And that's the point we're at now. After Jacob has worked for free for 14 years to receive his two wives.

With his two wives and with their servants, he had 11 sons, and a 12th child, Dinah. And so we are at the point where Jacob is ready to return.

Genesis 30:25-43

Jacob's Flocks Increase

25 After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go
back to my own homeland. 26 Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I
will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you." 27 But Laban said to him, "If I
have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has
blessed me because of you." 28 He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them."

29 Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared
under my care. 30 The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the LORD has
blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?"
31 "What shall I give you?" he asked.

"Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on
tending your flocks and watching over them: 32 Let me go through all your flocks today and
remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted
or speckled goat. They will be my wages. 33 And my honesty will testify for me in the future,
whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not
speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen."

34 "Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." 35 That same day he removed all the male
goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had
white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. 36
Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the
rest of Laban's flocks.

37 Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white
stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. 38 Then
he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front
of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, 39 they
mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted.

40 Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and
dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did
not put them with Laban's animals. 41 Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would
place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches,
42 but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to
Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. 43 In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and
came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Genesis 31:1-55

Jacob Flees From Laban

1 Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned
and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." 2 And Jacob noticed that
Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been. 3 Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Go back
to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

4 So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. 5 He
said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God
of my father has been with me. 6 You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, 7
yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not
allowed him to harm me. 8 If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks
gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the
flocks bore streaked young. 9 So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them
to me.

10 "In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats
mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. 11 The angel of God said to me in the
dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' 12 And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats
mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been
doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow
to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.'"

14 Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's
estate? 15 Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up
what was paid for us. 16 Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us
and our children. So do whatever God has told you."

17 Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, 18 and he drove all his livestock ahead of
him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in
the land of Canaan. 19 When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's
household gods. 20 Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was
running away. 21 So he fled with all he had, crossed the Euphrates River, and headed for the hill
country of Gilead.

Laban Pursues Jacob

22 On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. 23 Taking his relatives with him, he
pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. 24 Then God

came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."

25 Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. 26 Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. 27 Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of timbrels and harps? 28 You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters goodbye. You have done a foolish thing.

29 I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' 30 Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's household. But why did you steal my gods?" 31 Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. 32 But if you find anyone who has your gods, that person shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

33 So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing. 35 Rachel said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period." So he searched but could not find the household gods.

36 Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. "What is my crime?" he asked Laban. "How have I wronged you that you hunt me down? 37 Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us.

38 "I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. 39 I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. 40 This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. 41 It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times. 42 If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you."

43 Laban answered Jacob, "The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? 44 Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us." 45 So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 He

said to his relatives, “Gather some stones.” So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. [47] Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed.

[48] Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” That is why it was called Galeed. [49] It was also called Mizpah, because he said, “May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. [50] If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me.”

[51] Laban also said to Jacob, “Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. [52] This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me. [53] May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.” So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. [54] He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there.

[55] Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray.

Dear Lord, we thank You for Your word. Lord, we thank You that Your Word shares Your care for Your people. Lord, we thank You that Your Word shares Your invitation to return to You. And so, Lord, as we look at this passage, we pray that You will open our ears and our hearts that we may hear You as Jacob heard You, that we may go back to You and that we may be assured that You are with us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

I want to just touch a few things about this story because it tells such a great story of what God is doing. And it begins with this request to leave. Jacob knows that it's time to go back. And so he asks for his wives and his children and nothing else. Do you notice how Jacob is like, *“I have worked for you for 14 years, but it's now time for me to return.”*

But—and we've seen this before in Laban's character—Laban's like, *“No, I want you to stay.”* Because Laban recognizes God's provision comes through Jacob. Jacob states in the story how clear it was that when he began working for Laban, he didn't have a whole lot, but now Laban has much. And Laban realizes that it is not because of Jacob, but it is because the God of Jacob that he is doing okay.

Maybe you have seen that as well in today's society, where you see a business thrive and it's not because of the owner, but it's because of people who work for them. And God has blessed their work and others thrive because of it. And so Laban says, *“I'll tell you what, name your wage, and then you can hang around for a little while, because working for me is a good thing.”*

And so Jacob says, *“Fine, we'll separate the flock. Anything that is spotted or streaked or not of what is normal color in the goats or the sheep become mine.”* And then we get this interesting

story, this piece where Jacob takes plants and stripes them so you can see the inside of the bark. And he puts them in front of the sheep and the goats as they breed.

This was typical Mesopotamian practice, for here is how we create fertility. And we think, *"I don't get it. Jacob, you believe in God, and yet you're doing these things from the country to try to help you out."* But we notice how God provides in that way. We notice that in all of this, God is the provider.

And Jacob recognizes that as he leaves with his flock, he recognizes that all he has comes from God. And we go, *"I don't understand. Why, Lord, would You bless something which is kind of a common practice from someplace else? How are you using that to glorify You?"* But this isn't the only place that we see God using physical pieces to show how God is at work. But it gives us something tangible to see.

Richard D Philips, in his commentary, points out that God provides physical things for us to do, even though it is he who provides the outcome. Jacob used striped pieces of wood, Moses used a bronze snake, and Joshua blew trumpets.

"In these cases, the actions of believers did not cause the miracle but bore witness to their faith by giving them a tangible way to show their trust in the God of Israel."

Jacob didn't really believe that this was going to change anything for him, but he knew it was a way in which he could participate in what God was doing.

And so Jacob, with his flocks, was depending on God. He was depending on God even in these difficult times for God to provide. And God did provide. And as you read along and you hear the story, you see that Jacob participated in this with the strong sheep and goats and not with the weak ones.

And the weak ones continue to have babies which went to Laban, and the strong ones had babies which went to Jacob. And so Jacob has now built up over six years a massive flock for him to take. And so in ***Genesis 31***, we begin to see how everything changes.

And we see at the end of ***Genesis 31:2*** it says, *"[2] And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been."* Laban's character is showing up again. Laban, all this time, has been looking out for himself and he begged Jacob to stay so that Laban's flock could increase.

And now he sees that his flock really isn't increasing. In fact, his flock is getting weaker as Jacob's flock is getting bigger. And Laban's sons are going, *"Hold on. Jacob is taking everything that their father had, and he is ending up with it. We know there's trouble coming."*

And at that time, the Lord visits him. Jacob once again hears from the Lord. In ***Genesis 31:3***, it says, *"[3] … the LORD said to Jacob… "*

It's been a while since the Lord has given a clear voice to Jacob. The last time was in ***Genesis 28*** at Bethel, where God visited him in that dream.

And God says to Jacob two things. Number one is, *"Go back."* Do you remember in the dream where God said, *"You can leave, but I will bring you back to this land?"* And now God is saying to Jacob, *"It is now time to go back."*

But Jacob knows something else. Jacob is also thinking, *"Okay, Lord, I know it's time to go back. And I've been feeling that for six years. But I also know that my brother is there and he vowed to kill me when I left."* And God says to Jacob at this time, the same thing that he said to Jacob at Bethel. He said, *"I will be with you."*

When God calls us into a space where He says that He will go with us, He does not call us into this alone. He doesn't just say, *"Hey, you go and deal with it."* He says, *"I will go with you."*

And we see here that Jacob is now in this horrible situation. And sometimes God says, *"I'm going to use an outward difficulty to move a believer into the path of obedience."*

Richard D Philips says, *"God uses outward difficulties to move believers on the path of obedience."*

Sometimes our outward struggles are places where God is saying, *"I am going to use this to wake you up so that you see that I need to have you follow what I am asking you to do."*

We all deal with struggles. We all deal with things in our lives which are very difficult. And God says, *"In those times, you have a choice. You can obey me or you can continue on, but you need to know that I will be with you."* And so Jacob knows it's time to go.

And so he calls his wives into the field and he has a conversation with Rachel and Leah. And this conversation which he has, you might think, *"Oh, this is very good of him. You know, practicing good communication between husband—and in this case—wives."*

There's actually a legal piece in this. In Mesopotamia at the time, a wife was not allowed to be taken from her homeland unless they agreed to go. Otherwise it would be considered kidnapping. So Jacob knew that his wives had to agree with him to go with him back to Canaan.

And so he talks to them. And here is that moment in scripture where we have a beautiful agreement between Rachel and Leah. You may remember how they've been fighting back and forth and using their kids in the middle of that fight. And now they both say, *"You're right, we've got nothing here. Everything that our Father was given for our inheritance has been taken. And we see how God has blessed you. And so we agree that God is calling you back. And so we go with you."* And so Jacob packs everybody up and they leave.

Kent Hughes, in his commentary on this says, *"In many ways, this trip that Jacob takes with his wives and family foreshadows a trip that happens years later, when the Israelites come out of Egypt."*

Jacob leaves with his large family, his wives, his children, his servants, his livestock, and all that God had provided for him.

If you look at this trip, Jacob leaves with his large family of 12 kids and his wives.

And as the people of Israel leave Egypt, they leave as a large nation that began as a very small group. It began with just Jacob coming to that area. It began with just Jacob and his family in Egypt, and they live in a much larger area.

But it also shows how Jacob left with the plunder of Laban. Jacob over the last six years had acquired a great herd. And he had acquired much as far as other things as servants and camels and everything else. And he left with everything.

And if you remember the story of the Egyptians giving their stuff to the Israelites as they were leaving, *"Please take this, we want you out of here."* And so the Israelites were able to build a tabernacle which was immense out of the plunder of the Egyptians.

Laban pursues Jacob, and he pursues him because he wants him back. It's because it's for his benefit. Just like Pharaoh pursued the Israelites. The Israelites were the ones who were building for him and doing all his manual labor. He didn't want to lose them.

And so just as Jacob was pursued by Laban, and it says there that Laban pursued him for seven days. This isn't just, *"Okay, I'll see if I can catch up."* This is, *"I'm on a hunt and they are not getting away."*

In fact, to give you a bit of an idea of how far that is, this is Haran up here.

And this is Mizpah.

And from there Jacob will actually go here

and then back to Bethel again.

But you see, this is quite a trek (between Haran and Mizpah. This is a distance which Laban is like, *“I'm going to get these people back.”*

And then Laban is also forced to let Jacob go. Laban doesn't die as Pharaoh did. But in either case, the pursuer went home empty. And in either case, God had provided freedom for them.

God spoke with Laban just before he caught up to Jacob and said, *“I'm telling you right now, Laban, don't touch him. If you do know that, you're dead.”* And with the Israelites, God put a wall

of fire in between Pharaoh and the Israelites. And then when Pharaoh tried to cross the Red Sea, God took care of that and shut the Red Sea down.

And so here we have this piece. But there are some insights in this story which I think are important for us to grab onto. And so if we go back to ***Genesis 31:19***, it says this, *"[19] When Laban had gone to shear his sheep (they would have been a 3 day journey away), Rachel stole her father's household gods."*

Rachel and her father's **te.ra.phim (תְּרָפִים)**... her father's gods.

This is an interesting little piece in here because Rachel, as she knows that they are going to leave, takes with her some of the household deities. These wouldn't be huge statues.

They would be just little things and as we see later, small enough that you could hide in a camel sack and sit on and not worry about being found out.

But Rachel took them. In fact, it says that Rachel stole them. And. And then in ***Genesis 31:20***, it says, *"[20] Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban… "*

And actually the Hebrew word for both *"stole"* and *"deceived"* is the word **gā·nav (גָּנַב)**

We see that Rachel stole the household deities, but Jacob stole Laban's heart. He took it from him in a way that everything that he had hoped for in his children and grandchildren were now going to be gone.

But going back to Rachel for just a moment, there is a need in Rachel to hang on. Even though she has seen everything that God has done through Jacob, and she has heard about God working through Jacob, and she has heard from Jacob how God has taken care of them, there's still a little bit of her that's like, *"I'm just going to hedge my bets just a little bit. Maybe these household deities had something to do with it. And so I'm going to grab one of those as well and take it with me."*

And when you think about that, are there things in our life which we say, *"We know that God is going with us, we know that God is going to take care of us. But I'm just going to hang on to this piece. I'm just going to make sure that my bank account is in a good place in case God doesn't come through. I know that God has built up my bank account, but I'm going to hold it as opposed to when God nudges me to give to someone. Well, God, yeah, I know that, but I have to make sure that I'm okay."*

And God in this story is reminding us that when you are called to leave and follow God and God says, *"I will be with you,"* then you leave everything.

That doesn't mean that you're not stewardly with what God has provided for you. That doesn't mean that Jacob's like, *"Well, I don't need to take the flocks with me."* God has provided for him, but it means that we are going to totally trust God at His Word.

And through this story, we see that Jacob's character has changed as well. Jacob admits to Laban when Laban catches up, and he basically says, *"I was afraid and I left because I thought you were going to take my wives and daughters."*

But we also see Jacob going out of confidence. We see Jacob taking God at His Word and saying, *"I know that God is calling me and that God will care for me and that I will go with Him."*

And so Jacob goes similar to what was said before by ***Richard D. Phillips.*** He has this quote which he says, *"Faith requires both trust in God's promises and obedience to his commands."*

Some of you might be in your head going (Pastor John sings it), *"Trust and obey. For there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey."*

That's what God invites us to do, to fully trust Him and to fully obey. And Jacob is so sure of this. He says, *"If you find something–whoever's got it, they will die."* Little did he know that the thief would die soon in childbirth.

And then we end with this covenant which is made, this covenant between Laban and Jacob. And it's interesting that it is Laban who begins by saying, *"Let's make a covenant."*

And so there is this place in which they pile stones. *"[47] Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed."* Which means *"heap of witnesses".* This covenant was made in front of people that says, *"We are going to abide by this."*

And then it says the place is also called Mizpah, which means *"watchtower"* or *"watch post"*. This is a place in which they are saying, *"May God from this place watch."*

In fact, this phrase, *"May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other"* sounds like a great phrase, does it not? And it's often used by people, and people often say, *"Let's quote this verse in Genesis.. as we are apart, may God watch over us."*

But did you catch the meaning of God watching over us as it went on? This was not a meaning of, *"May the Lord keep us safe while we're apart and bring us back together."*

This was, *"May God watch you, and if you ever cross this boundary, may God kill you."* This was a boundary set up where they realized, *"We need to set a point where you can be and where I can be, and we can both live in peace."*

And the children of Israel lived within that boundary, and the descendants of Laban lived within their boundary. And when they crossed boundaries, it was war.

And so this is a place where they are saying, "May the Lord set a boundary between us."

And sometimes we need to set boundaries. Sometimes we need to set boundaries because we know that going into that other area is going to lead us in paths where God does not want us to go, whether that boundary is with a person or maybe it's with something else that you set up a

boundary that you say, *“I am going to make sure that I do not go in this direction because that is not where God wants me to be.”*

And so they both make an oath. Laban makes an oath and Jacob makes an oath. But notice, Laban's oath includes the God of Abraham, but it also includes many other gods. And Jacob says, *“No, there is just one God.”* He calls him the fear of Isaac. We fear God not in that we are afraid, but that we recognize that He is the only God, the only true God.

And so we ask ourselves this as I wrap up and invite the praise team to come on back.

What is it that I am hanging onto from my past?

Are there things that I need to get rid of that are keeping me from fully dependent on God?

In fact, this week's verse of the week, ***Numbers 23:19*** says, *“[19] God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”*

We can take God at His Word and He will respond.

And the second question I have for you is this. God said to Jacob, *“I will be with you.”*

And I ask myself this…

Are my trials leading to a greater dependence on God? Are my trials leading to a greater dependence, knowing that God is there? Or am I being challenged to walk on my own?

And God reminds us that, *“I will be with you.”*

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You for who You are. We thank You Lord, for watching over us. Thank You Lord, that You are always with us. And so, Lord, help us that we may trust You more, that we may obey You more, that we may live our lives completely for You, because You are the Lord of all. In Jesus’ name. Amen.