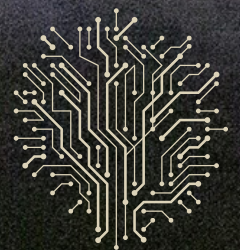


Salt in the Wound

A JOURNEY WITH JACOB



SALTBUSH

UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

Salt in the Wound is produced by Saltbush as part of the commitment of the NSW & ACT Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia to reimagining ministry in and with rural, regional, and coastal communities.

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Welcome and Introduction

There were so many good reasons to keep our hands off this story:

- the complexities of the conflict between Israel and Gaza,
- the patriarchal themes and practices that still confront all communities and societies,
- issues of land, belonging, and inheritance that remain a wound in our colonial histories and multicultural societies,
- and the genuine danger of touching raw nerves because of the broken and/or violent family situations that we know of or hear about as part of our own community.

"One does not simply walk into Mordor", as Boromir (from Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings") would say, but this fraught and frightening landscape is, in fact, where we journey together in life and faith, searching for signs of God's presence with and within us. This is the landscape in which we meet the telling of the story of Jacob.

So, welcome to a journey with Jacob. This is an ancient account, part history, part myth and community story-telling, part faith. It is a foundational narrative in which we find truth. As old as this story is, the truths within are as relevant in this century and as much a challenge; they are like salt rubbed into our wounds.

Jacob's story reminds us that we are created, named, and claimed by God, who is there in our beginnings, our callings, our becomings, and our passings through the diverse landscapes of life that leave us changed:

*"But now, this is what the Lord says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze."*

Isaiah 43:1-2 (NIV)

Salt in the wound usually means to add insult to injury, to cause more pain.

But we use it differently:

Salt in the wound is being told a painful truth.

Our wounds exposed by others.

Salt in the wound is healing.

Salt draws out the impurities in a wound and helps the wound to heal.

Salt in the wound brings us to places of stark honesty and, hopefully, wholeness.

How to use this guide

This is an uncomfortable set of conversations. Like salt in a wound, they sting and irritate before they can soothe and heal. We hope you will sit with them – on your own or, preferably, with a small group of people with whom you are willing to explore your life and faith.

There are seven chapters, each representing a particular phase in Jacob's life story and focusing on a specific theme. You can work through each in sequence or choose four significant to your current life phase or the life of your congregation for a month-long small group study.

Each chapter consists of four parts:

- **Readying:** a short introduction that will help you quickly identify the focus of the conversation, and a prayer for you to offer slowly. Savour the times of silence indicated as you still yourself before God.
- **Reading:** selections from the book of Genesis and the Gospel of John – you may want to read the verses between each set of study readings to get a comprehensive picture of Jacob's journey.
- **Reflecting:** a brief commentary on a core theme from the reading. In future, a companion Word Around the Bush liturgy and sermon will be released to broaden these reflections.
- **Responding Together:** each theme offers three questions and an activity for delving into the reading and how it applies to your life – as an individual or a community. If you are using this as a conversation guide within a small group, it would be helpful to clarify expectations, i.e., are you going to set aside quiet time to reflect or encourage each other to share your responses? Are you talking about your personal life or the life of your congregation or faith community? Safeguard one another's rights to share at a "just right" level, respecting personal boundaries and nurturing vulnerability.



Chapter One

Origin Stories

Readying

Here begins the account of two brothers: the elder brother Esau and the younger brother Jacob. It is the start of a long history both woven with God and with God woven into the story of their lives. It is also a long history of resentment, competition, and wounded relationships. As you read this passage, draw on your experiences, thoughts, questions and critique. Draw into it your thoughts around salt in the wounds of life.

PRAYER

Let us not be distracted by much, but still ourselves in God.

silence

Within ancient words, we hear the truth; within that truth, we see our own lives.

silence

Lord, open to us your presence and your truth in this time and place
as we journey along our own paths,
with both the relationships of unity and disunity.

silence

Let Jacob the younger and Esau the elder speak to us
as we explore faith and life together.

silence

Amen.

Reading: Genesis 25:19-34

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, ²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²² 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. ²³ And the LORD said to her,

*'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.'*

²⁴ When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ Afterwards 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.

²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. ²⁸ Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. ³⁰ Esau said to Jacob, 'Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!' (Therefore he was called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob said, 'First sell me your birthright.' ³² Esau said, 'I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?' ³³ Jacob said, 'Swear to me first.' So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Reflecting

If we can step outside our modern world, back into an ancient time, this passage has the uncertainty and danger of birth, the tension between siblings, the scarcity of food and the risk of starvation. This passage also illuminates a human characteristic - a blindness to that which is of value.

Jacob finds himself in competition with his brother even as they are being born. We might assume that being a skilful hunter and a man of the field was envied and of higher status in the family, while being a quiet man living in the tents was seen as the lesser character.

And so, over a pot of lentil stew, deception and falsehood are set in course to be a foundational part of this relationship, this family and their history. This is a deception and wrestling that has been bubbling away since birth.

For sure, in this passage, there is a choosing. Jacob makes a choice. That choice reads as if the gripping of the heel is as real in the adult years as it was in the birth.

We might also wonder about siblings like James and John, or Mary and Martha, and the tension and the choosing we read about in their lives in the Gospels. With all these siblings, as perhaps within our own lives and relationships, we find both times of choosing and experiences of God weaving into our own life stories in diverse ways. In the lives of Esau and Jacob, the woundedness of their circumstances is the ground where God begins to rub the salt.

Responding Together

- Share a part of your own family/sibling histories and stories (or church family/relationship histories and stories).
- How do you understand or think about the idea of choosing as part of relationships, life, faith, and the Christian community?
- What leapt out in this passage for you?

Personal Response

Draw your own picture, as you like, of Jacob grabbing onto Esau's heel. Don't see it as Jacob and Esau; see it as you grabbing onto something. You may or may not want to share these drawings after but decide as a group if you want to share or not before your draw.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a drawing. It occupies the lower half of the page.



Chapter Two

Stealing The Blessing

Readying

This passage is essential in the patriarchal narrative because it vividly illustrates how God's plan and promise to Abraham unfolded despite human sin and weakness. The chapter reveals flaws in the characters and dysfunction within the family of Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob. They all acted selfishly and deceitfully, indifferent to God's yearning into relationship. Isaac favoured Esau, even though God had said that the younger son would serve. Rebekah favoured Jacob and used manipulation and lies to secure his blessing. Following his mother's plan, Jacob deceives his father and exploits his blindness and weakness.

PRAYER

Gracious God,

We are grateful for the powerful story of Jacob and Esau as it continues to remind us that you are always in control, even in uncertain circumstances, providing us with deep reassurance and comfort. For you are sovereign.

silence

Forgiving God,

Help us to always seek your will and to trust in your timing, even when we may not fully comprehend it. Grant us the wisdom and discernment to make choices that align with your purpose in our lives, for your timing is always perfect.

silence

Compassionate God,

Empower us to resist the temptation of manipulation and deceit and inspire us to wholeheartedly trust in you. For you are faithful.

Amen.

Reading: Genesis 27:1-29

When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, 'My son'; and he answered, 'Here I am.' ² He said, 'See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. ³ Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. ⁴ Then prepare for me savoury food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die.'

⁵Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, ⁶Rebekah said to her son Jacob, 'I heard your father say to your brother Esau, ⁷"Bring me game, and prepare for me savoury food to eat, that I may bless you before the Lord before I die." ⁸Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. ⁹ Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savoury food for your father, such as he likes; ¹⁰ and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.' ¹¹ But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, 'Look, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin. ¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.' ¹³ His mother said to him, 'Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me.' ¹⁴ So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savoury food, such as his father loved. ¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; ¹⁶ and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ Then she handed the savoury food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

¹⁸ So he went in to his father, and said, 'My father'; and he said, 'Here I am; who are you, my son?' ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.' ²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?' He answered, 'Because the Lord your God granted me success.' ²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.' ²² So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' ²³ He did not recognise him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. ²⁴ He said, 'Are you really my son Esau?' He answered, 'I am.' ²⁵ Then he said, 'Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you.' So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. ²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come near and kiss me, my son.' ²⁷ So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said,

*'Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.*

²⁸ *May God give you of the dew of heaven,
and of the fatness of the earth,
and plenty of grain and wine.*

*²⁹ Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!*

Reflecting

Jacob was undeserving of God's love, yet God loved him anyway, demonstrating God's sovereignty. Just as God chose Jacob before he was even born, God chose each of us before we came into this world. This is how it works for all who have faith in Jesus Christ. We do not enter this world actively seeking God. If God had not pursued us before we sought God, none of us would have ever sought God. If God had not chosen us before we chose God, none of us would have made that choice.

If we are anything like Jacob, and we know we are all capable of deception, temptation, and failure, then we should not rely on our own works but on God, who has mercy on us. As we reflect on the actions of Jacob and his family, it's natural to feel a sense of injustice. We may question why God chose Jacob over Esau and allowed Jacob's deception to succeed. However, it's important to remember that, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we are all flawed and sinful.

The perplexing aspect of God's love for Jacob, despite his deceitful nature, raises questions about its fairness. Perhaps we can delve into the concept of God's grace and the path of grace, just as God showed grace to Jacob. Instead of longing for fairness, how can we extend grace to others in the same way that God extends it to us? It is important to actively seek and appreciate God's grace, just as God graciously bestowed it upon Jacob.

Responding Together

As you engage with these questions of justice, temptation, and grace, you may want to consider them either at the more personal level of your own life or from the broader perspective of your life together:

- As we observe the injustice in this story, what does injustice look like to you?
- Have you ever experienced something intended for you being given to someone else?
- When have you felt the extension of God's graciousness towards you?

Personal Response

Spend 5-10 minutes in silence looking at the full-size image in relationship with the passage. After, share the connections, thoughts, feelings that arise for you.







Chapter Three

The Dream

Readying

As Jacob flees the wrath of Esau, the blessing begins to unfold where God promises descendants that number the 'dust on the earth'. In his deceit and ultimate despair, Jacob comes to rest in a place that turns out to be sacred. This may lead us to ponder where we have felt distant from God in our lives, only to recognise we have been traversing sacred ground.

PRAYER

Eternal Creator, as we sit with the immensity of your grace and love, may we encounter again your holy presence in the ordinary and everyday moments of our lives.

silence

In Christ, we pray.

Amen.

Reading: Genesis 27:41, 28:10-22

Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. ¹¹ He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹² And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And the Lord stood beside him and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴ and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵ Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.' ¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!' ¹⁷ And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

¹⁸So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, ²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you.'

Reflecting

Esau's desire for revenge is understandable, particularly as he grew up with the understanding that he was favoured by his father to receive the blessing. This would have been instilled in him from birth; now, that blessing is stolen from him and Esau is wounded and vengeful.

We might wonder about Isaac and Rebekah's parenting and how they favoured one son over the other. These twins were set up from the start to compete with each other. To add to this woundedness, Isaac and Rebekah modelled divisive behaviours that would have deepened the animosity between the brothers. Despite this dysfunctional family dynamic, God continues to honour the blessing of Jacob (the birthright); the wounds of a family move them to a different space and an unexpected outcome.

As Jacob flees from Esau, he finds rest in the wilderness – a desolate place without any comfort, where a rock becomes a pillow. In this wild desolation, heaven and earth meet, and God transcends and speaks to Jacob through a dream. The dream is filled with presence and promise, and the desolate place becomes alive with sacred movement and moment. Jacob anoints the land's sacredness, names it Bethel (house of God) and commits his life to the purposes and presence of God. Here, a profound shift takes place between Jacob grasping and Jacob giving.

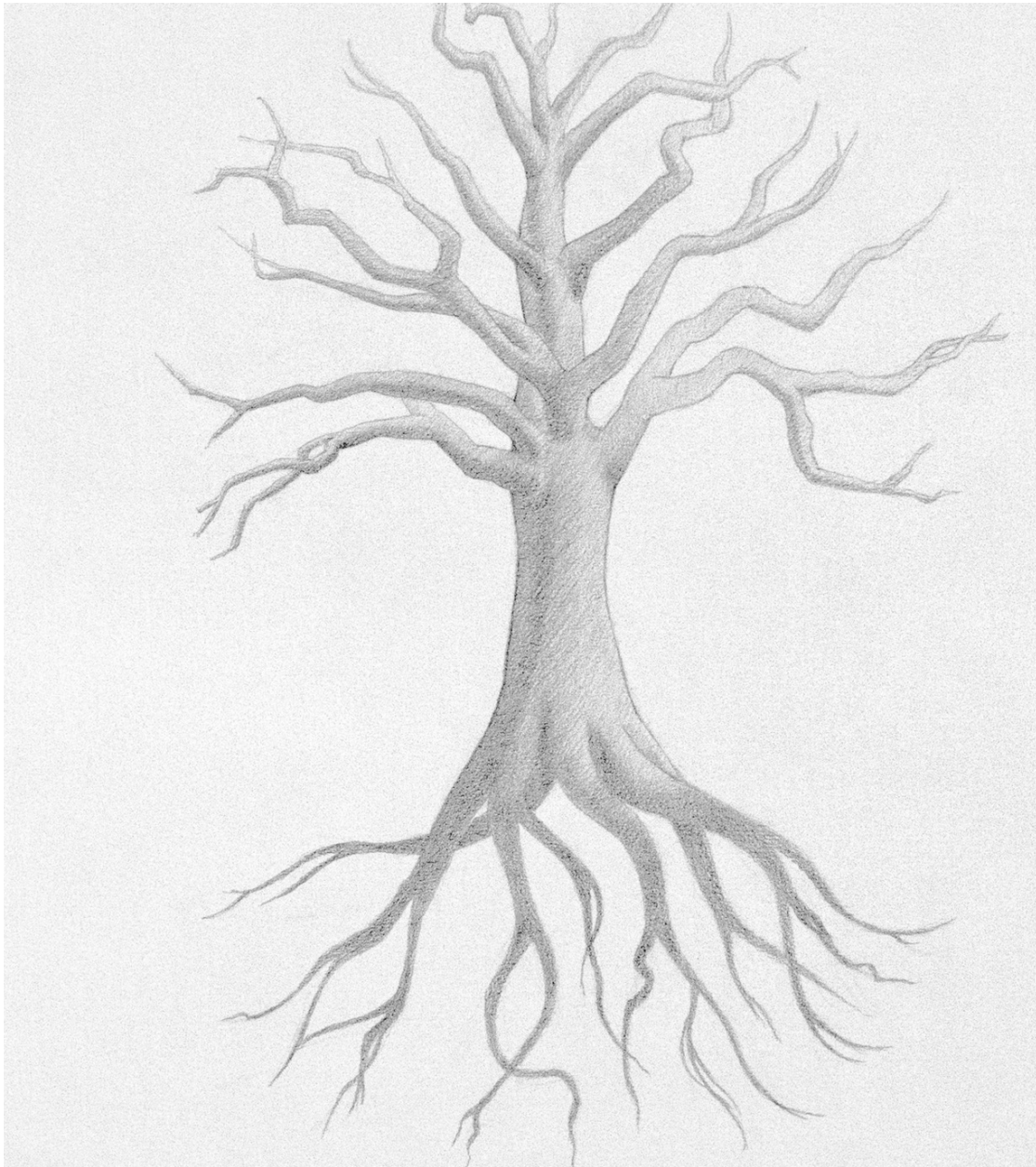
Responding Together

Jacob found himself at Bethel after fleeing a complex family dynamic, one in which he participated in an action of deceit. We will always reflect on our own family or relationship dynamics. Some would have been healthy and life-giving and some difficult and destructive. In many ways, they have shaped who we are. As we navigate these very human relationships, God also desires to be in relationship with us, setting us on a journey of discovery, wholeness and reconciliation.

- Where have the wounds of your nuclear or church family changed your life?
- When have you felt distant from God and/or alienated from others, only to find you have been traversing sacred ground?
- How have you responded to God's movement and moments in your life? What do you think is God's movement and moment in the life of the Christian community today?

Personal Response

Like families, a tree's roots go deep. Around the tree (in one colour), write words that accurately describe your family. Sit for a moment. Consider what you have written. Then (in another colour), write words that accurately describe your relationship with God. You may or may not want to share these drawings - but decide as a group if you want to share or not before you draw.





Chapter Four

The Hard Work of Being Human

Readying

I recently had a conversation with the postie in which he (laughingly) informed me that I was ill-qualified to do his job. "Well, if I'm brutally honest," I countered, "most days I'm ill-qualified to be considered any sort of adult at all." Oh, if only life and faith could be worked out only on wide-open paths full of beauty, abundance, imagination, freedom, and inspiration! But a significant part of the Christian journey is the hard work of growing up into a living expression of God's loving nature. This is the reason that Eugene Peterson refers to discipleship as "a long obedience in the same direction." In this conversation, Jacob's twenty-one years of work invite us to explore how our life's labour has offered both challenge and change in our longings, our relationships, and our so very human nature.

PRAYER

God of our hearts,
may our love for you deepen in this time together.

silence

God of our heads,
may our vision of life expand in this time together.

silence

God of our hands,
may our crafting of community temper in this time together.

silence

Amen.

Reading: Genesis 29:15-30

¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?' ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, 'I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.' ¹⁹ Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.' ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.' ²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. ²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. ²⁴ (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) ²⁵ When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?'

²⁶ Laban said, 'This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.'

²⁸ Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. ²⁹ (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) ³⁰ So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years.

Reflecting

After the detailed and drama-ridden stories of Jacob's formation into a (not-so-fine) young man, the next twenty-one years of his life seem to disappear in a flash of just fifteen verses. Work makes up most of that.

What is Jacob working for? Well, to earn the heart and hand of a woman he met at a well on the road of Aram – a love story much like that of his parents. So, he, who we know as a grasper and deceiver, makes a deal to do seven years' worth of an honest day's work for his uncle in order to prove himself worthy of the beautiful Rachel.

Instead, the tables are turned on him, and the deceiver becomes deceived! By the very same customs around first- and second-born children that have been so unpalatable in Jacob's family life, Laban marries off his veiled eldest daughter first and poor Jacob only discovers the trick in the morning.

Can you imagine the anger, the frustration, the betrayal he must have felt? Do you feel any pity for him? Do you think, for a moment at least, it may have given him some insight into how his brother and father must have felt when he fooled them?

What is important about this story is that, instead of running away from his problems again, Jacob chooses to do the backbreaking work of staying in that place to labour for another seven years for the sake of love.

Since his dream at Bethel, he is changing, making different choices, and settling down into new patterns that demonstrate commitment, resilience, and integrity. Jacob is still far from perfect – but he is choosing to grow up!

Responding Together

In thinking about hard work and your own humanity, talk about the following questions:

- What are the main things that you have worked for? How have they shaped who and how you are in relationship with others?
- What gifts and challenges have your working years presented you with?
- How do you deal with disappointment when your hard work (including as a Christian community) has not paid off or been appreciated?

Personal Response

Begin to write a letter here of appreciation to someone in your family, community, or congregation affirming the significance of their work or good attitude OR a note of encouragement to someone who you can see trying to turn their life around. If you'd like to, you might consider giving it to them.





Chapter Five

Prevailing Through Our Woundedness

Salt in the Wound: A Journey with Jacob

Readying

When we are facing a difficult situation and struggling with the changes in our circumstances, we may deflect its intensity by considering that others are in a worse situation. This sentiment holds a certain level of empathy; however, it limits us from acknowledging the real challenges we are facing. It may also deflect our responsibility for causing the difficulties while denying the deeper issues behind our struggles. We want to avoid being exposed; we will often do anything not to be wounded by our actions. Yet our honest struggles bring a woundedness that changes us; hopefully, we are no longer the same. Jacob's life of avoiding his deceptive behaviour has finally caught up with him on the banks of the Jabbok River. Here, he must wrestle with God and be wounded for life!

PRAYER

Wrestle with us Holy presence, for a long time.

That we would become exhausted by our own fears of being found out, of being exposed, of not being real and authentic.

silence

Then wound us.

And may our wounds change us; may we find life in our weakness.

silence

In the name of Christ, the one who is wounded.

Amen.

Reading: Genesis 31:55; 32:1-2, 22-32

⁵⁵ Early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them; then he departed and returned home.

32: ¹Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him; ² and when Jacob saw them he said, 'This is God's camp!' So he called that place Mahanaim.

²²The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

²⁴ Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' ²⁷ So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' ²⁸ Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.' ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.' ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

Reflecting

Sick of his father-in-law's manipulations, Jacob fled Laban, only to encounter his long-lost and embittered brother Esau. He found himself caught between his past actions and possible future demise. Exhausted, he collapsed on the banks of the Jabbok, and now he was to wrestle with God.

It feels like this was inevitable. Jacob had to reckon with God, who is unnamed. Jacob must face the reality of who he is. The struggle with God is a struggling with his own reality, with who he really is - his true self.

This is something so many of us try to avoid. We want to be seen as successful, strong, resolute and confident. Vulnerability, fear, and insecurity are considered weaknesses; we construe these as signs of failure or a lack of faith.

By owning who we are, we can move to places of being honest and authentic with ourselves, others and God. We are wounded, but our wounds change us; they heal us of our self-deception. We are continuously altered and no longer the people we like to think we are, but the people the unnamed God has named.

In all this is the tension of wrestling, woundedness and blessing.

Responding Together

- Remember a time when you have wrestled with God as a community of faith or as an individual. What did you find out about yourself?
- What are the wounds you carry? How might these wounds bring you life?
- After engaging with these reflections, how do you feel about the prayer at the start of this conversation?

Personal Response

Looking at this image of Jacob, centre your mind, steady your breath. Remember a difficult conversation you may have had recently. Describe your feelings and write down as many as you can.



Now, sit, breathe steadily, and feel your body relax and if there is anything else that comes to mind, write it down.



Chapter Six

Journeying Alongside Each Other

Readying

In this passage, Jacob, filled with trepidation, musters the courage to approach his long-estranged brother, Esau. Overcoming his fears of retaliation, Jacob chooses a path of reconciliation instead of aggression or avoidance. He humbles himself, bowing down seven times before his brother - his actions a demonstration of his genuine remorse and strong desire for peace. As Jacob's actions unfold, we witness a transformation in Esau's heart. Softened, it paves the way for a heartfelt embrace between the two brothers. Tears are shed, marking the beginning of a new journey where they will walk alongside each other as the woundedness of the past gives way to healing.

PRAYER

Lord, we pray you may open our eyes to your boundless love for us.

silence

Grant us the wisdom, humility, grace, and strength to mend and revive our relationships, specifically the pain that has marred our connections with others.

silence

Our prayer is for the restoration and healing of these wounds and the reconciliation of strong bonds within our families, friendships, and communities.

silence

Amen.

Reading: Genesis 33:1-12

Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. ² He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³ He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he

said, 'Who are these with you?' Jacob said, 'The children whom God has graciously given your servant.' ⁶ Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; ⁷ Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down.

⁸ Esau said, 'What do you mean by all this company that I met?' Jacob answered, 'To find favour with my lord.' ⁹ But Esau said, 'I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.' ¹⁰ Jacob said, 'No, please; if I find favour with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favour. ¹¹ Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.' So he urged him, and he took it.

¹² Then Esau said, 'Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you.'

Reflecting

Esau's decision to let go of the past and reconcile their relationship showcases the incredible capacity for forgiveness we humans possess. It is a powerful testament to our ability to let go of anger and offer forgiveness, even in the face of immense pain or wrongdoing. Esau's actions reflect the forgiveness that God extends to us when we repent and seek God's mercy. Jacob felt overwhelmed with gratitude and reverence in response to Esau's forgiveness. He saw this as a divine moment, comparing it to seeing God's face. This recognition signifies Jacob's understanding of the transformative power of forgiveness and grace.

This passage is a timeless reminder of the importance of seeking and extending forgiveness in our lives. It teaches us that forgiveness can heal and restore relationships no matter how deep the hurt or betrayal. Just as Esau forgave Jacob, we are called to forgive others and seek the grace and mercy of God in our own lives. Forgiveness can feel like salt in the wound – simultaneously painful and healing.

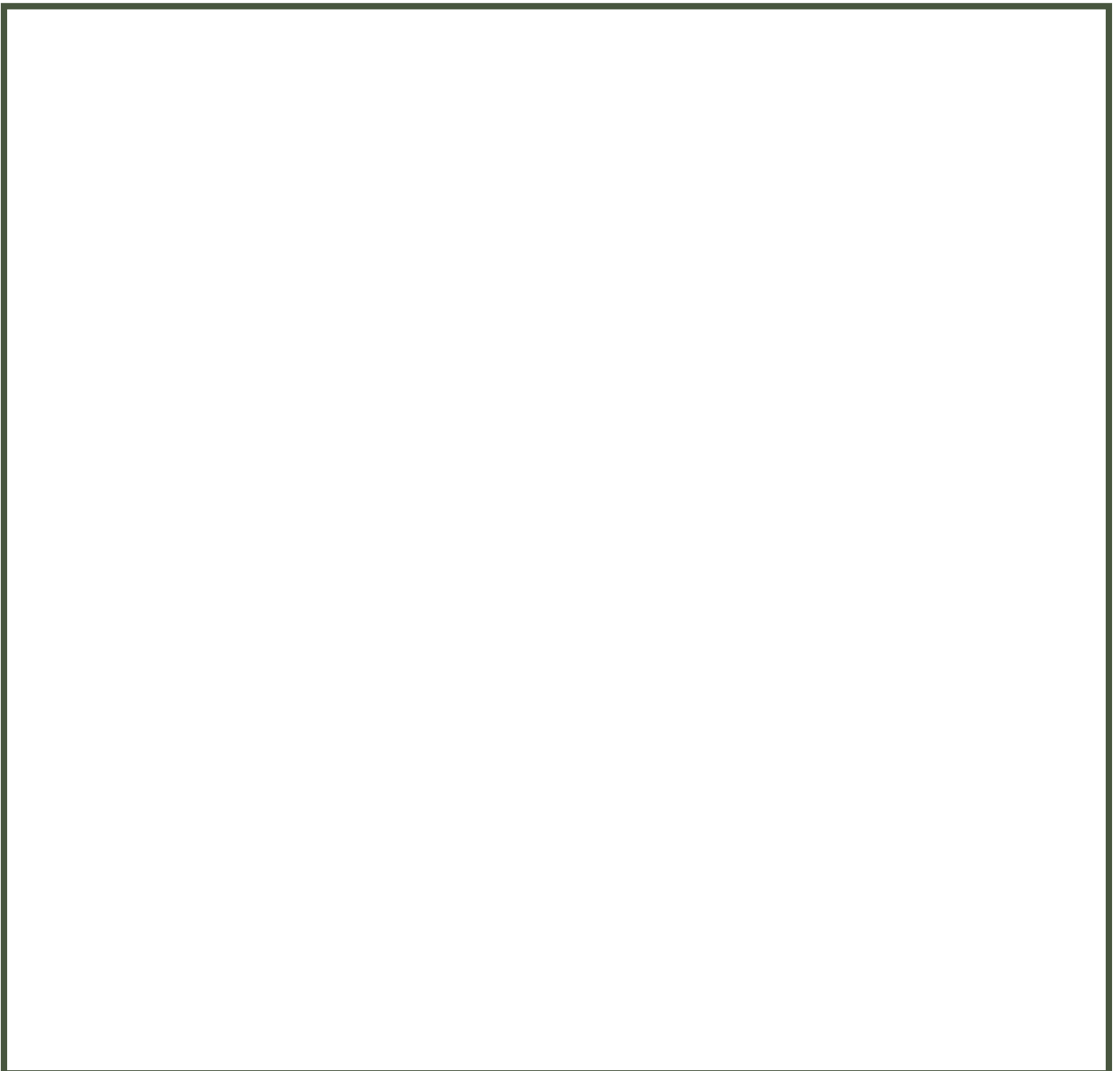
In this story, we also see reconciliation as an extension or outcome of forgiveness, but this is only sometimes the case. Reconciling can be challenging as we struggle to set aside our differences. However, once we can look beyond the negative aspects of the other person, we can embark on a journey alongside each other for the goodness of God. This journey can be a transformative experience that lasts a lifetime; not just physical, but a profound inner exploration that challenges and shapes our perspectives, values, and our faith.

Responding Together

- Does Jacob's encounter with Esau speak to you about challenging situations in your own life or in your community?
- Looking at Jacob's life, how does that speak about the practice of humility and reconciliation in relationships?
- Talk about the practice, the choosing, the struggle of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Personal Response

Create a visual representation of the path that you have taken with God, where you have faced various obstacles that ultimately led to reconciliation.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a visual representation of a spiritual journey.



Chapter Seven

The Place of Truth

Readying

As a woman raised within the oppressive apartheid regime and, later, overt patriarchal systems with which I had to negotiate to have a voice, John 4 has been a longtime inspiration and comfort that, in Christ, I am seen and known and valued. As we reach this final conversation in our journey with Jacob, a communal well becomes a significant place of encounter between Jesus and one of Jacob's ancestors: a woman from Samaria who is longing for something more than what the socio-cultural and religious rules of her time have determined she deserves. As these rules are broken and the truth is spoken, a new way of life is available for both the woman and her whole community.

PRAYER

In the driest continents and countries of the world,
water is a precious commodity, a blessing, a source of strength and life.
In the spiritual wastelands of our world, the Living Water is the gift of God
that soothes the parched, revives the exhausted,
and lures the sleeping seeds within the soul to blossom.

silence

We come, this day, to Jacob's well
and claim the everlasting joy of water
as it is poured out in the sharing of our lives
and the true telling of this story.

Amen

Reading: John 4:1-15 (read further if you like to verse 30 for the whole story)

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptising more disciples than John" ²(although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptised), ³he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Reflecting

In our journey with Jacob in the book of Genesis, we discover that we can be shaped by our encounters with the Living God into maturing disciples capable of obedience, transformation, repentance, respect, and reconciliation. Yet, it would be naive to think that these intentional choices will magically make us perfect or solve all our problems. As my youngest would perpetually tell my eldest when he got injured in their frequent roughhousing, "Saying sorry doesn't suddenly make it better!"

As we jump to the Gospel of John, the story of Jacob's well sets us up for an encounter with the black-and-white boundaries that have emerged between Jacob's ancestors over the generations since his life and death: Jacob | Israel, Jews | Samaritans, temple worship | mountain worship, men | women, married | unmarried, physical | eternal, individual | community. These divisions and dualisms are the product of navigating the complexities of human relationships and struggling to find our place within our family, church, community, country, world, and even universe.

Jesus and the Samaritan woman represent polar opposites in their society. There should be no foundation for dialogue, but the well and the need for water offer a way into a deepening conversation in which each offers their truth until they stand on the common ground of longing for the eternal and the life-giving in a world that leaves us parched and exhausted. It's a profoundly vulnerable moment for which both might be rebuked but, instead, find welcome. And it's a story that offers a start for giving and receiving Life in everyday life

Responding Together

Picture yourself at the well, the place of truth, then answer the following questions:

- What are some impacts/effects of dualistic or black-and-white thinking in your life and/or community?
- What truth about yourself do you want to risk sharing today?
- As Jacob's story lived on and created a backdrop for new conversations, how do you hope your story will endure and make space for others to find life?

Personal Response

In the picture below, write on the jug life-giving gifts you have to pour into your family, church, community, etc.; then, in the glass, write about the life-giving gifts you need to receive right now. If you are comfortable, share them with your group and see what you might give to or receive from one another.



For Further Reading around each chapter's theme.

Chapter 1

Richard Rohr (2020) *The Wisdom Pattern; order, disorder, reorder*
Franciscan Media, Cincinnati



Chapter 2

Joel S Kaminsky (2007) *Yet I loved Jacob; reclaiming the Biblical concept of election*
Nashville Abbingdon Press

Parker Palmer (2024) *Let your life speak; listening for the voice of vocation*
Jossey Bass, New Jersey



Salt in the Wound: A Journey with Jacob

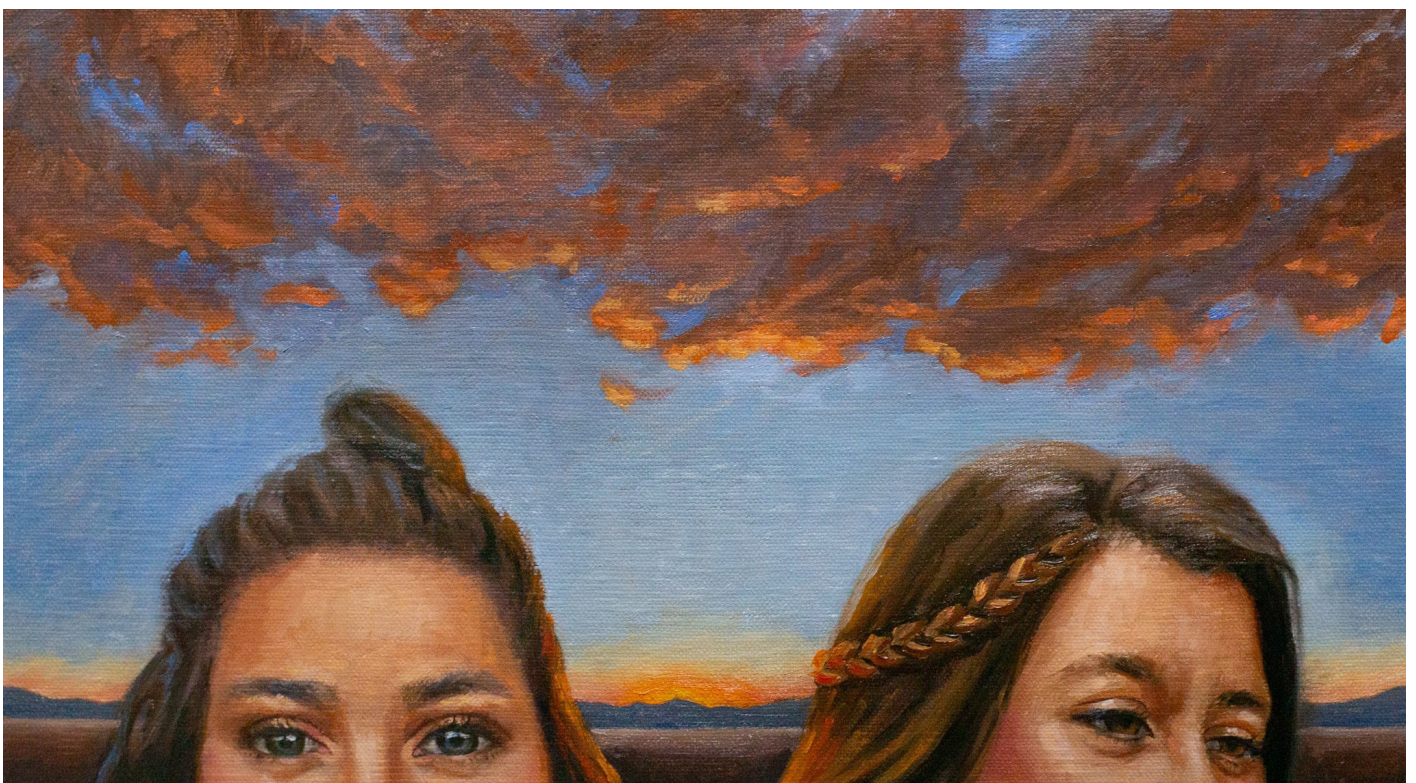
Chapter 3

Trevor Hudson (2015) Friendship with God
Struik Christian Media, Tyger Valley



Chapter 4

Eugene H. Peterson (1980). A long obedience in the same direction: Discipleship
in an instant society. InterVarsity Press, Illinois.



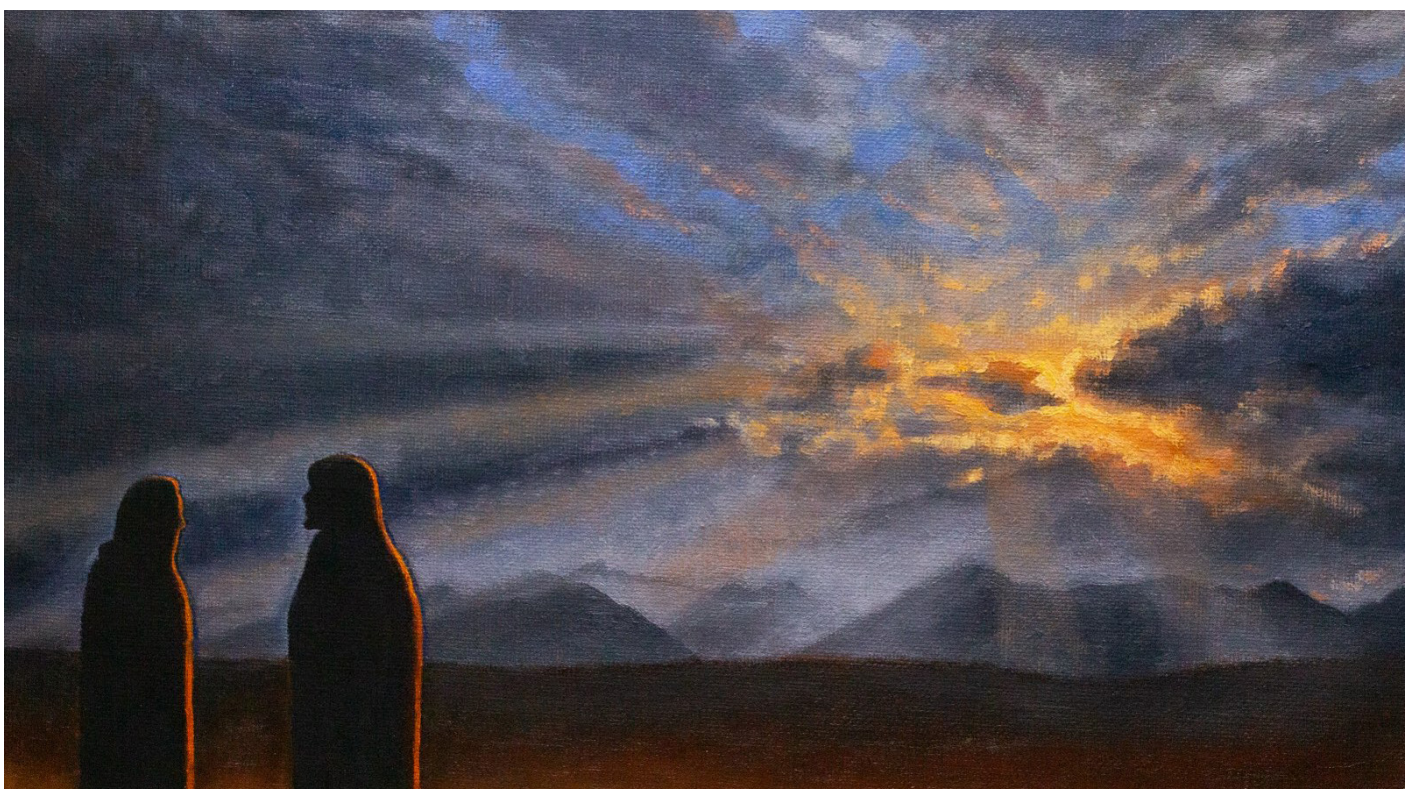
Chapter 5

Joel McKerrow (2019) *Woven; a faith for the dissatisfied*
Acorn Press, Sydney



Chapter 6

Desmond Tutu (2011) *God is not a Christian; speaking truth in times of crisis*
Mixed Sources, Chatham



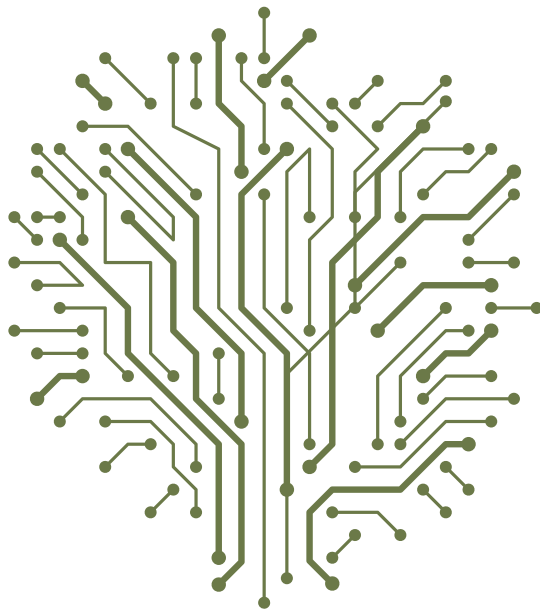
Salt in the Wound: A Journey with Jacob

Chapter 7

Miroslav Volf & Justin E. Crip (eds) (2015). Joy and Human flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture and the Good life. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

Thomas Keating (1990) Awakenings (1992) Re-awakenings
Crossroad Publishing Co. New York





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UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY