

God is With Me Wherever I Go
Genesis 28:10-22
July 24, 2016, Leora Sawatsky

This last week at Island Adventure Camp we learned that God is with us everywhere we go. We learned that God KNOWS, HEARS, STRENGTHENS, LOVES and SENDS us. Each day we heard a true story from the Bible how this is real. Each story showed us how God has showed this to be true in the past. And if it was true in the past, it is true today. God is never changing. He is always the same.

All the different stories we heard this week, the story of Noah, Jonah, Peter walking on water, Jesus and the disciples and Paul being sent out, are all a part of a much, much bigger story. The story has one main character. Someone who is in every story and which every story is about.

In order to understand any story, we need to first hear the beginning and for us that means we can look in our Bibles to Genesis 1. The story starts with God. God has always been and will always be. He is forever. God spoke into the darkness and with his words created light. He continued to create with his words, forming a perfect space of land, water, trees, animals, birds and sea life. Seeing all that he created God said;

"Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

27 So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26 & 27, NLT)

God looked at his creation and said that it was good. The people He created were very good. He intentionally made human beings to be like Him - so that they could have a relationship with Him, to have relationship with each other and to rule over the land. He created people in a unique way giving them the right and option to choose to love Him back. He gave them a large area to live in, to eat from, to rule over. All was well in the garden that God placed Adam and Eve - the first people on earth, they lived and walked with God.

God gave Adam and Eve one rule. One simple rule - do not eat from a tree in the middle of the garden. You can eat from any other tree... just not this one. Do you think that would be hard rule to follow? It wasn't.... but guess what? Adam and Eve broke God's one rule, choosing their own way instead of God's way.

When Adam and Eve choose their own way it broke the perfect relationship that human beings had with God. God is perfect and holy and is separate from sin. Sin is choosing our own way and breaks our relationship with God. There was now a gap between God and people.

Right after Adam and Eve broke God's one rule, they felt something they had never felt before. They felt shame, you know when you have done something wrong and you know that it is going to hurt someone you love OR get you in trouble... that feeling you feel... that's shame. So Adam and Eve went and hid. They didn't want God to find out what they had done. Here is

something true about God. God KNOWS me. He knows what choices I make and sees all of me.

God knows what Adam and Eve did, yet even though He knows where they are, He knows what they did. God called out to Adam and Eve. "Adam, Eve - where are you?"

Adam and Eve were disobedient, there was only one rule in the whole world and they broke it. And yet - this is what is true about God. He loves us so much that he will come and be with us, even when we break his heart, even when we hurt him by choosing our own way. God is with us everywhere we go.

Adam and Eve had a consequence for their choice, just like God said they would. They had to leave God's beautiful garden. The earth and everything in it started to die. What was once perfect, now was broken and flawed.

This what is true about God. He loves his creation so much that he had a plan, a rescue plan to solve the sin problem that broke the relationship between people and God. He told Adam and Eve that one day he would send someone to crush sin. He was promising to keep showing people that He was with them, loved them and wanted them to be in relationship with him no matter what. Adam and Eve believed God. They lived outside the garden and worked hard to live.

As time continued, it was clear that brokenness was a part of the world. Cain killed his brother Abel. The people of the earth followed their own way so much that God was ready to destroy the whole earth, but he knew Noah's heart as Noah spent time loving God and responding to God. God gave Noah a plan, Noah had faith that God would do what He said He would do - which was to destroy the whole earth with a flood. Noah's job was to obey God and build a boat, collect all the animals and get on board. Noah built a boat, obeying God. God was with Noah. God saved Noah and his family from being destroyed. After the flood Noah and his family once again lived on dry land.

As time continue after the flood - you would think that people would learn their lesson. Learn from the mistakes that other people had made, but instead the people disobeyed God by building a tower trying reach the sky. They wanted to be famous - instead of obeying God. The disobedient people were scattered as God gave them new languages, reminding them that in order to have a relationship with God, you need to obey God.

More time passed and God continued with His plan of loving people, of making a way to fix the relationship with God. So far from history we know that fixing our relationship with God isn't by choosing our own way and it isn't working really hard at a project with other people - so far it has only been by believing that God will do what He said He will do and living like it.

Along comes a man named Abram and his wife Sarai. Abram and Sarai have no children, they are living in a land that Abram's father brought them to. While they were living there God came and spoke to Abram.

"The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 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.” (Genesis 12:1-3, NLT)

Abram was given promises by God:

If you - leave where you live and go to where I will show you...

I will

- Make you into a great nation
- Bless you and make you famous
- You will be blessing to others
- I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you
- Through you everyone all the earth will be blessed.

What does that mean? God is going to use Abram's family to bless the whole world, God is going to use Abram's family to show the world who God is and what God is like. He is going to use Abram's family to continue his promise of sending someone into the world to fix the sin problem. Abram believed God and lived like it. He packed up his family and started out to a land that God promised He would show him. Abram's journey wasn't a straight road. It was long and hard. It didn't look anything like Abram thought. In fact Abram struggled with obeying God and waiting for God to do what He said He would do. Abram made big mistakes along the way - but God was with him everywhere he went.

Eventually (25 years later) Abraham and Sarah had a son. They named him Isaac. Having one son doesn't really make a great nation... But Abraham and Sarah had faith that God would do what He said He would do and trusted Him to work out his plan. Abraham blessed Isaac telling him that what God had promised to Abraham would be true for Isaac as well. He would be the one to carry on God's promises.

Isaac grew up, got married and 20 years later... had twins. Esau and Jacob. Esau was born first - then Jacob. Esau, being the first born would usually be the one that the promise and blessings would be given to. But God had other plans. God often has a plan that we don't know anything about ... yet. As Esau and Jacob grew up anyone could tell that they were different. Esau enjoyed being outside and hunting, while Jacob enjoyed being around home.

In Genesis 25, Esau got so hungry after hunting one day that Jacob - instead of being generous and kind - tells Esau that he will sell him his bowl of soup for the rights of being the first born. Esau is pretty sure he is dying of hunger so he doesn't care and sells his brother the right to inherit all the things a first born would get. Everything that belonged to the father (Isaac) now belonged to Jacob - not Esau. The title of being the head of the household and double the inheritance. It was a big deal to be the first born son. Esau sold Jacob the birthright for a bowl of soup.

Esau didn't die of hunger. He lived and as you can imagine, this made Esau pretty upset over losing his birthright over a bowl of soup. He still had hopes of being the one to receive the blessing. The blessing that was given to Isaac from his dad, Abraham, and given to Abraham by God.

As the story continues Isaac is getting older, he is blind and he is ready to give the blessing to his first born son Esau. He tells Esau to go out, hunt - make him a meal and then he would give

him a blessing. Rebecca, Jacob and Esau's mom, heard this and prepared Jacob to steal the blessing from Isaac.

When Jacob came into the tent where Isaac was, he tricked Isaac. He told him he was Esau, he prepared a meal for him and even disguised himself with goat skin on his arms (because Esau was really hairy).

Isaac blessed Jacob.

*"From the dew of heaven
and the richness of the earth,
may God always give you abundant harvests of grain
and bountiful new wine.
29 May many nations become your servants,
and may they bow down to you.
May you be the master over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.
All who curse you will be cursed,
and all who bless you will be blessed."* (Genesis 27: 28 &29, NLT)

When Esau returned and went to bring his father the stew, they both found out the truth. Jacob had tricked Isaac. But once the blessing was given, Isaac couldn't take it back and give it to Esau.

How do you think Esau felt? He was mad. Mad enough that he planned to murder his brother after his father had died. Rebecca (their mom) knew this and had Isaac send Jacob away to her family, so he could live there and find someone to marry.

Jacob left his father's family and started on his way to his relatives. It was starting to get dark so he found a place to sleep. Using a rock as his pillow, Jacob drifted off to sleep. As he slept, he saw a stairway that went up from earth to heaven. On it, angels of God were going up and down them.

At the stop of the stairs stood the Lord. He said to Jacob;

"I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. 14 Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. 15 What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you." (Genesis 28:13-15, NLT)

I want to pause in the story here for a little bit and talk about who God is and what He is like. Jacob lied. He tricked his brother and his father. He has done NOTHING to deserve being the one who God blesses with land, family, fame and fortune. In fact, in my books, I would have written Jacob off. I would have put him aside and started to look for someone else to take on the job of being my light, being my example to others. (Aren't you glad I'm not God.... for so many reasons). Not God. God sees Jacob and loves him. God has always worked this way.

He has always chased after and loves people. He has always moved toward people even when they choose their own way. He has always had plan to save us from our brokenness. Our sin, our choices has not ever stopped God from loving us - just the way we are.

God looked at broken, selfish Jacob and loved him. He had a plan for his life. He wanted to use Jacob to show the world who He is and what He is like.

So what did God show Jacob (and us) about who He is and what He is like:

- 1) God is generous, even when we don't deserve it. God gives Jacob land, good land and lots of it. God gives good gifts, even when we don't deserve it. He is generous.
- 2) God uses people to show his blessing and character to others. Jacob's family was going to grow. Not because Jacob was good, not because Jacob deserved it, but because in having his family grow from generation to generation, more people would know who God is and what He is like. The way they lived, what they valued, how they worshipped God - as a nation they would represent God on earth... they often did a very bad job of this, but again this shows God's unfailing love toward his people.
- 3) God is present. He is with us. He promises Jacob that He will be with him. Although Jacob was going to a place he had never been, to be with people he had never met, he knew that he wasn't alone. God was with him. No matter what was ahead, he could always remember that God was with him. He wasn't alone. God is present with us. He is where we are, all the time.

Jacob did get married. He had 12 sons. His family grew to be 70 or more people quickly. One of his youngest sons, Joseph, was sold into slavery in Egypt. God used this terrible thing for something good. When a famine hit the land and there was no food for the Jacob's family, God had already provided for them through having Joseph in Egypt. Joseph had been given a plan by God to save food during the good times so that when the bad time came they would have enough.

Jacob, who later was called Israel, moved his family to Egypt. They lived there for 400 years. During that time they became slaves. How could this be a part of God's plan and God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Just like with most things, we have to zoom out and get a bigger picture. We can't always see what God sees. It probably didn't feel like God was with them while they were in slavery. They probably wondered if God was even real. They prayed to God. Could it be true that God hears them? He wasn't answering! Their circumstances didn't look like God was listening, but God does in fact hear us. He heard Israel's prayers and sent Moses to lead the people out of Egypt.

On their way into the desert, God asks the people if they would be his people and obey his command. If they would be his people and obey his commands - he would be their God. He would bless them and give them the land that He had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He would bless those who bless them and curse those who curse him and through their nation the whole world would be blessed.

"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. 6 And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation." This is the message you must give to the people of Israel. (Exodus 19:5-6, NLT)

Sounding familiar?

Israel says they will obey God's commands. They will be a light to the nations... they will only love and serve the one true God....

It doesn't take long before the people break this promise to God. Over and over again Israel broke God's perfect and holy way He gave them to live. God gave rules to live by. God gave ways for people to worship Him and no one could follow them perfectly.

God did not want to leave mankind alone. God loves his creation, the people he created so much that he continue with his plan of sending someone to fix the brokenness in the world.

Looking around, there was no one who was perfect. Everyone broke God's law. No one is perfect.

God had one solution. It was the plan all along, but now history proved it to be true...no one could be perfect or good enough to fix their relationship with God. So God, in his timing put his plan into play. It needed to be simple. It need to be perfect and it needed to make the problems caused by sin healed.

There was only one solution. God would have to send His son, Jesus to the earth. This unending love that God has for you meant that He would give up everything to save you. It means that He will choose you over Himself.

Most of you know this story. You know how God sent Jesus, His son, as a baby to be born into an Israelite family. Jesus was born and lived his life without sin. Sin is what separates us from God. Jesus never chose sin. His relationship with God was never broken... until he let it be for our sake. He took your sin and my sin, the sin of all the people who came before and all the sin of the people who came after and paid the required amount, life.

Remember how I said God never changes? It's true, he never does. Just like how in the garden of Eden he gave Adam and Eve the right to choose Him? The same is true for you and I today. God will not force you to choose Him. He will not turn anyone away. He has made the way for all people to fix their relationship with Him and He has kept it simple.

The nation of Israel proved it was impossible to keep all of God's laws, no one is good enough. So being perfect is out (but you already knew that)

Doing good things will never outweigh or get rid of the bad things we do. Besides if this was true, how would we know if we have done enough good... or too much bad... or did that count as bad or good.... life would be so stressful and joyless.... So that way is out...

We can choose God's way. His way is simple. He always keeps it simple. Jesus came, lived a perfect life without sin and died for my sin, for your sin. God raised Jesus back to life, proving He is stronger than death. And now we have full access to God because of Jesus. The relationship that was broken without a bridge now has a bridge - and that bridge is Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the life. Our part is saying - yes, I choose my own way (I sin). I know that God is perfect and I am not. I know that Jesus died so that I can live with God forever. I have

faith, I believe that Jesus paid the price for my sin so that I can have a relationship with God forever.

God wants to be with us. He gave up everything so that you can be with Him forever. He takes the broken and makes it's right. There isn't anything I need to do to make God love me more. He already loves me all the way and proved it.

So now, as I live out my life, I can know that no matter what happens, no matter what is happening around me - this is the truth: God is with me wherever I go. I don't deserve it, you don't deserve it... but that isn't how God works. God works by loving us right where we are at and urging us to move forward with Him one step at a time. God is with me wherever I go.