

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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March 12, 2006
2nd Sunday in Lent
Genesis 28:10-17
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 28:10-17
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 73
Second Lesson: Romans 5:1-11
Gospel: Mark 8:31-38

Rely on the Right “I’s”

Looking out, it looks like there are at least a few people here that are wearing glasses, and I imagine that some of you probably have contacts stuck on your eyeballs some place this morning as well. Maybe some of you have even got glasses now that not only help you see far away, but if you tilt your head just right, they will help you see up close. Your eyes must be just all messed up if they are that bad, right? They can’t even decide one way or the other which way they want to see. They just can’t see hardly anything at all anymore.

The rest of you here, though, don’t have any eye problems at all, right? Well, wrong. This morning as we consider this section of God’s Word, we see that we all have “I” problems. All too often, you and I rely on the wrong “I’s” and I am not talking about the ones that we see with. I am talking about the pronoun “I”.

All too often you and I rely on ourselves. When we rely on our “I’s”, it creates problems. But as we see this morning as we consider this story from the life of Jacob, when we rely on God’s “I’s” and his promises, it brings great blessings, great comfort, great confidence that we can go forward with as we walk through this lifetime no matter what our physical eyes look upon.

“I” problems can start pretty young though, really. Every child learns, after “mom” and “dad”, either the words “no” or “mine” first, right?—a variation of the word “I”. I remember when I was in high school my dad telling me, “You know. For the next few years you are going to think I am pretty stupid and that everything I know is wrong and everything you know is right. You are going to be wrong. It will take awhile, but you will finally figure that out.” He was dead on. I was convinced I knew better than him and looking back on it, I was an idiot. I had “I” problems. I thought I knew better than my dad.

Jacob had “I” problems. It is really interesting if you ever stop and read the account of Jacob and the household he grew up in. If you read about their life in the Bible, you don’t read about Ozzie and Harriet. You don’t read about perfect families. If you want the definition of a dysfunctional family, read about the family life that Jacob grew up in. His dad, Isaac, loved his twin, Esau. Remember Big Red? He loved him better. He was the outdoorsman and the hunter and all that, and that was Isaac’s preference. Their mother, Rebecca, had a preference for Jacob. That preference created problems. It created difficulties. God had said the older would serve the younger, and the younger would get the birth rite. The Messiah would come through him. That was God’s

promise, but they kind of said, “I appreciate what you said God. But I have better plans because you are not working fast enough. Let’s go steal that birth rite. Let’s go steal that blessing because God just isn’t keeping up with things. I know better than God.” So because he relied on his “I-sight”, so to speak, what he knew, he stole that birth rite and then Big Red, his brother, decided enough is enough. His dad was going to die pretty soon and then he was going to kill Jacob. Then mom had to come up with another plan and that was, “Let’s not have him get married around here. Let’s send him back to where Abraham grew up to find a wife from among our relatives there.” She did it because she was afraid Esau was going to kill her favorite son.

So he left. Not with a big entourage, not with a large posse with him. He left. He started walking. A 500 mile journey, and he started walking. He walked about three days and laid down at night upon a rock and had this dream, this vision.

Put yourself in his shoes. How would you feel? Three days into a 500 mile walk where you are all alone. You are leaving everything you know that you grew up with. Mom who favored you is nowhere in sight and you are walking along on your own. You took things into your own hands. You didn’t listen to God. You screwed up. You are now on your own with your head on a rock trying to catch a good night’s sleep. Do you think that you might have realized that you didn’t know best if you were in that position? Do you think you might have been worried that God was going to reject you because you were such a fool? Would you worry that God was going to leave you hanging on your own because you took things into your own hands and didn’t wait for him? Would you worry that God was going to abandon you because you abandoned him and took matters into your own hands? I have to believe those were some pretty real fears right about then, don’t you think? When he relied on his own “I-sight”, it lead him to all kinds of trouble, all kinds of heartache, all kinds of hardship, and I have to think a quivering that was in the pit of his stomach that just would not go away those three days he was walking.

You and I do some of the same things, don’t we? When we start insisting upon “I”—I know this better and I know that—we get ourselves in trouble. Things that when we would look at them in someone else, we would say, “That’s wrong. That’s sin before God.” But as you and I look at them in our life, I have a reason why it’s okay for me to do all those things, but when you do it, it would be wrong. We tend to use “I” to rationalize and excuse the things that we do that God clearly says are sin. Whenever we start relying on “I” instead of relying on God, we get ourselves in trouble. We excuse things that we know are wrong. We chase after wrong things and we have all kinds of problems. “I need more excitement in my life. My marriage is just too boring. I think an affair would really spice things up.” Then we are left watching children cry as a household is torn apart. I guess the “I’s” didn’t have it.

“I just have too many problems. I can’t deal with them all. I am going to find the answer in the bottom of this bottle.” All we find is more problems—financially and in relationships and otherwise. When we rely on our own “I”, we can get ourselves into some things that feel like a pretty big deep pit. When we are honest with ourselves, when no one else is looking and we are in the still of the night and we consider who we are and what we have done and what God expects of us, we see that we are in trouble

because we have separated ourselves from God. We have broken our relationship with him that he reestablished by giving us the Savior Jesus Christ. At those points in time, we might not know where to turn or where to go. We might be too afraid to go to another Christian because we don't want them to think poorly of us because we have done so many stupid things. Isn't that exactly why God puts us into the family of believers? So that we don't sit and judge each other and say, "I would never do that. How could you do such a thing?" But that we become the arms of Christ that reach around our brothers and sisters that have fallen into sin and lift them up and assure them that when they see their sin, they will also see clearly the Savior who has taken away those sins—the Savior who was perfect in their place so that through faith they are perfect in God's eyes.

You and I need to remember that, and sometimes the only place where we are going to get it is from each other. If we can't get over our own appearances, if our "I-sight" is so strong that I don't want to lay myself open to criticism because I have done something wrong, then I am going to keep myself from finding that encouragement from you that you are here to give me—that assurance of forgiveness, that assurance of God's love. That is why God puts us together. That is why he wants us to be a part of the family of believers that gather together in a place so that we can comfort and encourage each other. There comes a time when we need to get over ourselves. Not judge each other and not think that we can't open ourselves up to one another, but we need to get over the "I's" and focus on Christ and the love he has shown us and how he wants us to help and forgive and encourage and love one another. There isn't a single one of us here that hasn't done something stupid because we are all sinners. As was said this morning at Bible class, "Sin makes us stupid."

Sin made Jacob stupid. It got him into those problems. When he was worrying about being abandoned by God, quite possibly God gave him a vision that was amazing. Stairways going up to heaven—wide stairways so that angels can go up and down on each side—numbers of angels. What was the picture of that? God was still sending him angels to care for him, to watch over him, to protect him, to serve him because the angels serve those who will inherit salvation as Scripture tells us. Then there at the top, the LORD himself—the LORD, Yahweh, the God of the covenant, the God of full and faithful grace—opens his mouth and speaks in faithful grace and he uses "I" "I" "I" "I" over and over again so that Jacob would learn to stop focusing on himself and focus on God and put his trust in God's promises.

Look at what he says to him—"*I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.*" Do you think right about then Jacob might have been worrying about what is next? Would he think he was about to get it? Would he think it was the end? No. Look at how God continues—"*I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.*" Descendants?—he was all alone, right? He was off to find a wife. He had no wife. He had no descendants. He had a rock. "*I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.*" "*All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.*" Over and over he points Jacob to God. "I" will do these things for you. "I" will bless you and all nations through your offspring—the Messiah is going to come

from you. “I” will be with you and “I” will strengthen you and “I” will sustain you and “I” will guide you and “I” will be your companion until all these things that “I” have promised will be accomplished. Wouldn’t it be great if God would come and say something like that to us? Wouldn’t it be great if he said to us, “Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.” Wouldn’t it be great if he said to us that he would always be at our right hand, therefore we don’t have to be shaken? It is great, isn’t it, because that is exactly what he said to us.

In case we doubt it and in case we get worried about it, today we come to the Lord’s altar. We kneel. We receive his very body and blood where he says, “I am with you in this tangible way. I have taken away your sins. I love you and I will be with you no matter how deep the pit you have dug for yourself. I am there and I have already lifted you out of there through Jesus’ life and death. Believe me. Put your trust in me. I will walk with you wherever life leads you and you don’t have to be afraid, because the one who is for you is greater than the one who is against you.”

But we will still have our worries. We will still have our doubts. We will still have our anxieties, but each and every time that they come, we can turn to the Lord and know for certain that he loves us and that he is with us and that he has called us by name and that his love will bring us safely to our heavenly home. There are no doubts about that. When we look to the Lord, he has promised that he will strengthen us and sustain us. Every time we hear his Word, every time we receive his Sacraments, then we know that we are in the house of God because God himself is present in this tangible way through his Gospel. That enables us to forgive one another, to love one another and to build one another up in Christ.