

When I was twelve years old and living in Ravenna, my dad came into my bedroom one day to tell me that he got a new job, and that we would be moving to Syracuse. I remember feeling distraught and scared at the thought of leaving a place where I felt so comfortable. All my friends lived in Ravenna, my family was in the area, and, my house was the only one I had known. That summer, our family packed up all that we owned, and headed out to central New York...which might as well have been Iceland! Fast forward to this past week. As I was preparing for my sermon, I began to think how my dad's decision to take that new job, effected the course of my life, and ignited a chain of events that had a tremendous impact. Try to follow me here...If my dad had not taken the job in Syracuse, I never would have taken the school bus that I did; which would've meant that I would never have met Matt Van Antwerp. Matt was a young man who befriended me on the bus, and after a period of time, invited me to his church youth group. If I hadn't gone to that youth group, I might have never heard the gospel, which means I wouldn't have ever converted to Christianity. If I didn't convert to Christianity, I would never had gone to a bible college in Portland, Oregon. If I didn't attend that bible college, I wouldn't had become so disillusioned with the church, which caused me to leave the church, which then led me to go to SUNY Albany to study philosophy and Political theory, where I met Jen, and I started to go back to church, met my mentor Fr. Paul Hartt, who encouraged me to go to seminary and pursue Holy Orders, which ultimately led Jen and I being called to St. Paul's. Phew....you can see how this has all worked out. This brings us to our Genesis reading this morning. We continue to look at the life of Jacob, the Father of the people of God. Over the past few weeks, we have seen how Jacob was able to finagle the birthright from Esau, and last week, how Jacob encountered God in his dream of the ladder. This week we have heard the story of how Jacob meets, and marries his two wives, Leah and Rachel. Our reading starts by talking about Jacob's uncle Laban. Laban's reputation according to the bible, tells us that he was a cheat and a scoundrel. He switched brides on Jacob's wedding night, then robbed Jacob of his rightful wages. Even after Jacob had worked for him for twenty years, Laban believed he owed nothing to Jacob. He was a selfish, sly, and wicked man. I mean think about it, my man deceived his new son in law, pulling the old, oh you thought you would consummate you marriage with this daughter, aha, its actually my other daughter. Its the oldest trick in the book! In all seriousness, Laban's actions are quite despicable. But, what this story shows us, is that God can use the decision of one person, wether good or bad, to impact the lives of those in the future, for His Glory, and according to His plan. Because of Laban's trickery, Jacob was eventually blessed with a very large family; he ended up with twelve sons, the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Inadvertently, then, Laban had helped to carry out God's plans for Jacob. This story shows us that the plans of the wicked, in relation to God's plans, will always fail! It also shows us how Jacob has matured from his dealings with Esau, and the taking of the birthright. Even though Jacob was being dealt with in a really sketchy way, he dealt fairly and honestly, even with such a shady character as Laban. There is so much from this story that we can apply to our own lives. First, decisions that people make have long term consequences, good and bad. So many times we make decisions without thinking about the long term implications, as well as, that they might impact more than just the one making the decisions. When we need to make choices and take action, we must give serious thought about how it may impact others and is

the long term effect going to beneficial? The way we can do this, is to seek the Lord in prayer and reading His Holy Word to guide us in decision making. As our collect of the day prays this morning, "Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may pass through things temporal." When we seek the council of the Lord, and follow His precepts, we can make better decisions that will benefit the coming of the Kingdom of God. Another way that this story has application for us today, is that we can see even when bad decisions are made, God is faithful to overcome them, so that His plan might be fulfilled. The children of Jacob, would go on to be the very people of God, that He desired to bless. If we remember back a few weeks to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that their descendants would number the stars and the sand, then we can see that God uses Laban's wicked decision, to fulfill the promises He made to His people. I have had the tendency in the past to think that my decisions could somehow spoil God's plan for my life. If what we have said about God, way back in the first week of this sermon series is true, that God is eternal and unchangeable, then there is nothing we can do to mess up God's plans for our lives. This doesn't mean that we can't make bad decisions, or that we can't get sidetracked from God's plan, but that God ultimately is in control, and He can overcome any stupid decision we might make, so that His plan can come to completion. Does this mean that God was behind the recent terrorist attacks in Norway? Absolutely not! But what it does mean is that God can use the evil actions of one young man, and turn it around for His glory. It's hard when we are going through tough times, or trying to overcome a bad decision that has been made, to somehow believe God is in control...I get that. But we must constantly remind ourselves of the times we have seen God be faithful in the past. When we do this, we can remember that God has always been watching over us, and doing those things that will bring about His Glory and plans for our lives. And there is nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, that can derail us from the will of God! As Paul states in his letter to the Romans, We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." How wonderful; How Amazing! Nothing we do, could ever make God love us any more than he already does! If we think our actions make God love us more, then we don't fully understand what grace and mercy are. It is only gracious and merciful, if we are getting what we don't deserve! What we deserve

so often is guilt, punishment, and death. But God so loves and cares for us, that he gives us His free gift, LOVE! Have you experienced this in your own lives? If you haven't, may I encourage you today to seek Him out. His gift of Love is free, and cannot be earned. None of the decisions that you or I have made, can overcome God's plan for our lives, and all we have to do is say "yes." And when we say "yes," we too will become bearers of God's plan for all humanity, and help usher in the Kingdom of God. Amen.