2017 FPCC LENTEN STUDY

WITNESSES TO

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL

WRESTLING

WITH

RECONCILIATION

THE SAGA OF JACOB,

THE BELHAR CONFESSION,

THE NEWEST RESIDENTS OF ERIE

AMIDST LONG-TIME RESIDENTS OF ERIE,

AND LIFE AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST

First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant

The Caring Church in the Heart of the City!

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This is the Lenten Study for the First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant for 2017: Wrestling With Reconciliation, The Saga of Jacob, the Belhar Confession, the Newest Residents of Erie Amidst Long-Time Residents, and Life as Disciples of Jesus Christ. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on March 1st, and concludes with Holy Saturday on April 15th. Lent is a period of 40 Days (not including Sundays) to help prepare us for Easter.

This study is intended to be used by small groups or individuals and is to be used in a way that meets your needs as individuals and groups. Please feel able to modify this material as you feel led by the Spirit in order to enter into the process as fully as possible. You are free to select what works best for you within any or all of the sections.

While it has for a long time been the practice for the Church to focus on membership, an important practice of belonging, the call of God in the name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit is to the deeper practice of discipleship. A disciple is a follower of a teacher, and within the Christian tradition we understand this teacher to be Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were all written to give a witness to what God had done in the person of Jesus. The Confessions of the Church were written to help the Church understand what God was up to in a particular time and in a way that would continue to be valuable. This Lenten study is rooted in the newest Confession of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Confession of Belhar, which was fully adopted in 2016 as one of the Confessions of the Church known as the PCUSA. It is supported by scripture verses that are essential to understanding what God is saying in and through the Confession. This study is also supported by listening in on stories of reconciliation within the Bible, as the Confession of Belhar is primarily about the reconciliation of the people of God with God and with one another. The photographic display in the gathering space outside of the parlor at FPCC is another collection of stories you’re invited to reflect on, incorporating at least one each week into your following of this discipline.

This study is intended to be used daily and includes a section of the Belhar confession and a reading from Scripture reflecting a Biblical story of reconciliation. The printed text is from the New Revised Standard Version, you’re welcome to use any translation.

You’re encouraged to read the texts slowly. If you’re in a group, have one person read the text out loud. Then take time to reflect on the text. What caught your eye or your ear? What made you pause, wonder, even stop? Take advantage of the lines to note a word or a phrase that caught your attention. Then read the text again, pondering the questions.

May you find this study helpful, hopeful, and faithful as you seek to do the best you can in all that you do, with all that you have, given God’s help, amidst the challenges and comforts that come your way during these days of your life amidst this Season of Lent. Thanks to Seph Kumer and Britney Knight for their important contributions to this study!
Week One: March 1-7
Larger Story: Genesis 25.19-34: The Rivalry of Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom)
Focus Story: 25.27-28: Isaac’s love of Esau vs. Rebekah’s love of Jacob
Focus Story: 25.29-34: Esau sells Jacob his birthright

Week Two: March 8-14
Larger Story: Genesis 27.1-45: Jacob tricks Esau out of Isaac’s Blessing
Focus Story: 18-29: Jacob receives blessing intended for Esau
30-40: Esau begs Isaac for ‘second blessing’

Week Three: March 15-21
Larger Story: Genesis 28.1-22: Rebekah sends Jacob off to her brother, Laban
Focus Story: 10-22: Jacob’s Ladder

Week Four: March 22-28
Larger Story: Genesis 29.1-31.55: Jacob’s life in Haran
Focus Story: 29.1-28: Jacob marries Leah/Rachel

Week Five: March 29-April 4
Larger Story: Genesis 32.1-33.20: Jacob’s reconciliation with Esau
Focus Story: 32-22: Jacob wrestling at River Jabbok

Week Six: April 5-11
Larger Story: Genesis 37.1-36: Joseph Sold(?) Into Slavery
Focus Story: Genesis 37.1-11: Joseph: Dreams/Long-Sleeved Coat

Holy Week: April 12-15
Wednesday/Maundy Thursday/Good Friday/Holy Saturday
Larger Story: Genesis 39.1-41.57: Success/Temptation/Imprisonment/Resurrection
Focus Stories: Genesis 39.1-6a Joseph: Success
    Genesis 39.6b-18 Joseph: Temptation
    Genesis 39.19-41.13 Joseph: Imprisonment
    Genesis 41.14-57 Joseph: Resurrection
Week One: March 1-7

Larger Story: Genesis 25.19-34: The Rivalry of Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom)
Focus Story: 25.27-28: Isaac’s love of Esau vs. Rebekah’s love of Jacob
Focus Story: 25.29-34: Esau sells Jacob his birthright

Genesis 25.27-28
When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Genesis 25.29-34
Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!” (Therefore he was called Edom.) Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Questions based on Genesis 25.19-34...
What thoughts/feelings do you have regarding Rebekah given the gestation narrative in the larger story, Genesis 25.21-23?
What thoughts/feelings do you have regarding Rebekah given the birth narrative in the larger story, Genesis 25.24-26?
What do you make of the author sharing Isaac’s age (25.20 and 25.26) but not Rebekah’s age? Does that conjure up any other questions in your mind you’d like to ask the author? If so, what is the question/are the questions?

Questions based on Genesis 25.27-29...
What is your impression of Esau? What is your impression of Jacob?
What influence do the words “skillful” (Esau), and “quiet” (Jacob) have?
What influence does the description of their skill sets have with you?
What do you experience when you hear of one parent favoring one child, the other the other?
What do you make of the author sharing why Isaac loved Esau, but not why Rebekah loved Jacob?

Questions based on Genesis 25.29-34...
What does the word “famished” mean to you? What do other translations offer?
How do you feel about Jacob’s demand from Esau, given that Esau had (in all likelihood) killed the meat in the “stew”?
What relationship does Edom have with “red stuff”? Check your study Bible’s notes.
What do you think Esau means in v32: “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?”
If you were Esau, what would you have done? If you were Jacob, what would you have done?
Have you ever “despised” your birthright? If so, how have you done so?

Weekly Reflection Questions...
In what ways is the story in Genesis 25.19-34 a story of conflict?
In what ways is the story in Genesis 25.19-34 a story of reconciliation?
What (very) human characteristics does this story reflect, even depend upon?
How are these stories of God?
The Confession of Belhar

Revelation 21.6-7  **We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

Matthew 28.19-20  **We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

Confession of Belhar Questions...

What is the meaning of the triune God for you?
What is the meaning of the words “one”, “holy”, and “universal” for you?
How do you experience the statement of the “triune God…gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit” as an act of reconciliation?
The Belhar Confession identifies the membership of the Christian church as “the communion of saints called from the entire human family”. What do you think this means?

Week One: March 1-7

Pick a photograph and a story from the wall of the gathering space of the exhibition entitled: “RUST BELT NEW AMERICANS, A Showcase of Erie’s Refugee Population”, by Maitham Basha-Agha. Reflect on both what you see in the photo and what you read in the text that accompanies the photo. What issues of reconciliation are present in the photo? In the story?

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NOTES on WEEK ONE

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Week Two: March 8-14

Larger Story: Genesis 27.1-45: Jacob tricks Esau out of Isaac's Blessing
Focus Story: 27.18-29: Jacob receives blessing intended for Esau
Focus Story: 27.30-40: Esau begs Isaac for 'second blessing'

Genesis 27.18-29

So [Jacob] went into his father, and said, “My father”; and [Isaac] said, “here I am; who are you, my son?” Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you have told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.” 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.” 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.” 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.” He did not recognize him, because his hands were hair like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him. He said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He answered, “I am.” 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. Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near and kiss me, my son.” 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.
May God give you of the dew of heaven,
and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine.
Let the 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!”

Genesis 27.30-40

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting. He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, “Let my father sit up and eat of his son’s game, so that you may bless me.” His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am your firstborn son, Esau.” Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, “Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? —yes, and blessed he shall be!” When Esau heard his father’s words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me, also, father!” But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.” Esau said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing.” Then he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?” Isaac answered Esau, “I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?” Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing father? Bless me, me also, father!” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

Then his father Isaac answered him:

“See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck.”

Questions based on Genesis 27.1-45...

What strikes you about Isaac’s request of Esau in 27.1-4?
What strikes you/impresses you about Rebekah’s behavior in 27.5-17?
What is your impression of Isaac?
What is your impression of Rebekah?
What are issues requiring reconciliation in 21.1-17 and 21.41-46?
What is Esau mourning in 27.41? How is mourning an act of reconciliation?
Questions based on Genesis 27.18-29...
What is a time you deceived your parent(s)? Was there a need for reconciliation?
Has there been a time in your life when you were deceived by your child? A friend?
How did you feel? Respond?
What blessing(s) do you offer others?
In what ways do these blessings have reconciling features?

Questions based on Genesis 27.30-40...
Put yourself (as well and as fully as you can in Esau’s skin. How would you feel about:
Isaac, your father; Jacob, your brother; Rebekah, your mother?
What are other translations of Isaac’s response in 27.33? Esau in 27.34?
Have you ever been deceived by a brother/sister? Did you reconcile?
What strikes you about the poetry of 27.39-40?

Weekly Reflection Questions...
In what ways is the story in Genesis 27.1-45 a story of conflict?
In what ways is the story in Genesis 27.1-45 a story of reconciliation?
What (very) human characteristics does this story reflect, even depend upon?
How are these stories of God?

The Confession of Belhar

We believe
Ephesians 2.13-22 that Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;
Ephesians 4.11-16 that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought; one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;
Psalm 133 John 17.20-23 that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.

Confession of Belhar Questions...
Christ’s work of reconciliation has been made manifest in the church because__________?
How do you understand unity as both a gift and an obligation?
How do you experience the community of believers known as FPCC to have been built up to attain unity?
How do you experience unity as a “binding force”? Why do you believe God desires unity to be a “binding force”?
What words would you use as synonyms for “this unity” the confession speaks of?

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**Week Two: March 8-14**

Pick a photograph and a story from the wall of the gathering space of the exhibition entitled: “RUST BELT NEW AMERICANS, A Showcase of Erie’s Refugee Population”, by Maitham Basha-Agha. Reflect on both what you see in the photo and what you read in the text that accompanies the photo. What issues of reconciliation are present in the photo? In the story?

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**Week Three: March 15-21**

Larger Story: Genesis 28.1-28.22: Rebekah sends Jacob to safety of her brother Laban

Focus Story: 28.10-22: Jacob’s Dream/Jacob’s Ladder

**Genesis 28.10-22**

Jacob left Beer-Sheba and went toward Haran. 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. 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. 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 your offspring; 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. 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.” Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!” 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.”

So 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. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. 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, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, 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.”

**Weekly Reflection Questions...**

In what ways is the story in Genesis 28.1-28.22 a story of conflict?
In what ways is the story in Genesis 28.1-28.22 a story of reconciliation?
What (very) human characteristics does this story reflect, even depend upon?
How are these stories of God?

**Questions based on Genesis 28.1-28.22...**

What is the blessing/charge Isaac issues to Jacob in 28.1-5?
Why do you think Esau responds the way he does?
What responsibility does Isaac have for seeking reconciliation between his sons?

**Questions based on Genesis 28.10-22...**

What is the most unusual place you have ever spent a night?
What strikes you about the LORD’s promise to Jacob in 28.13-15?
How does Jacob need to be reconciled to God? Why does God take the initiative?
What “awesome” experience have you had with God? Did it include reconciliation?
How would you describe this as a story of reconciliation?
The Confession of Belhar

We believe

that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active
in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience,
practice and pursue community with one another; that we are
obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and
blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are
of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one
Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of
one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one
cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the
breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to
the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one
other’s burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another
and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we
suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together
serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or
hinder this unity;

that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under
constant constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, back-
grounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by
virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and en-
richment within the one visible people of God;

that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this
church.

Confession of Belhar Questions...

Which of the “manifestations of the unity of God” do we practice well within FPCC?
Which of the “manifestations of...unity” could we practice better within FPCC?

Week Three: March 15-21

Pick a photograph and a story from the wall of the gathering space of the exhibition entitled:
“RUST BELT NEW AMERICANS, A Showcase of Erie’s Refugee Population”, by Maitham Basha-
Agha. Reflect on both what you see in the photo and what you read in the text that accompanies
the photo. What issues of reconciliation are present in the photo? In the story?

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NOTES on WEEK THREE
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Week Four: March 22-28

Larger Story: Genesis 29.1-31.55: Jacob’s Life in Haran
Focus Story: 29.1-28: Jacob works for Laban and marries Leah and Rachel

**Genesis 29.1-28**

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. As he looked, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well’s mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.

Jacob said to them, “My brothers, where do you come from?” They said, “We are from Haran.” He said to them, “Do you know Laban son of Nahor?” They said, “We do.” He said to them, “Is it well with him?” Yes,” they replied, “and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep.” He said, “Look, it is still broad daylight; it is not time for the animals to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them.” But they said, “We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.”

While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep; for she kept them. Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother’s brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the flock of his mother’s brother Laban. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s kinsman, and that he was Rebekah’s son; and she ran and told her father.

When Laban heard the news about his sister’s son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh!” And he stayed with them a month.

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

Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go into her, for my time is completed.” So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went into her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) 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?” Laban said, “This is not done in our country—giving the younger daughter before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) So Jacob went into Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years.

Questions based on Genesis 29.1-31.55...

Note the meaning of the names of the children in this story.
What connection do they have with reconciliation?
How do you feel about the women in this story?
How does Jacob trick Laban?
How does Rachel trick Laban? Why would one steal the “household gods”?
This is another story that includes stones (31.44-54).
How does this story speak to reconciliation?
What does Jacob want? What does Laban want? What does the LORD God want?
Questions based on Genesis 29.1-28...
How does Jacob’s question in 29.6 speak to reconciliation?
How does Laban trick Jacob? Do you think Laban considers it a trick?
If you think he does, what might be the purpose?
How does the idea of receiving women in marriage in lieu of wages sit with you?

Weekly Reflection Questions...
In what ways is the story in Genesis 29.1-31.55 a story of conflict?
In what ways is the story in Genesis 29.1-31.55 a story of reconciliation?
What (very) human characteristics does this story reflect, even depend upon?
How are these stories of God?

The Confession of Belhar

Therefore we reject any doctrine
which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;

which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;

which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;

which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

Confession of Belhar Questions...
What does the Confession say about church splits? How do you respond?
Why does the Confession treasure reconciliation over diversity?
Why does the Confession describe the lack of unity amongst the church a sin?
How do we as the community of faith known as FPCC uphold/violate paragraph four?

NOTES on WEEK FOUR
Week Four: March 22-28

Pick a photograph and a story from the wall of the gathering space of the exhibition entitled: “RUST BELT NEW AMERICANS, A Showcase of Erie’s Refugee Population”, by Maitham Basha-Agha. Reflect on both what you see in the photo and what you read in the text that accompanies the photo. What issues of reconciliation are present in the photo? In the story?

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NOTES on WEEK FOUR

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Week Five: March 29-April 4

Larger Story: Genesis 32.1-35.29: Jacob’s Reconciliation with Esau through Death of Isaac

Focus Story: Genesis 32.22-32: Jacob’s Wrestling with God and the Blessing

Genesis 32.22-32

The same night [Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 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. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” So he said to him, “What is your name? And he said, “Jacob.” 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.” Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And then he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved. The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. 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.
Questions based on Genesis 32.1-35.29...
How is the story of 32.1-2 a story of reconciliation between God and Jacob? 32.3-21 is a story of Jacob seeking to reconcile with Esau. What strikes you? Read Jacob’s prayer to God in 32.9-12. What does the prayer help Jacob decide? What does Jacob believe will help him in terms of reconciling with Esau? In 33.1-20, what fears of Jacob are not realized in encountering Esau? What role does fear play in you pursuing/not pursuing reconciliation?

Questions based on Genesis 32.22-32...
When have you felt the most alone in life? What do you ‘wrestle with’ when alone? How does reconciliation factor into Jacob’s name change to Israel? How does Jacob know that it is God who has given him his new name? How does your relationship with God as a disciple of Jesus help you know God?

Weekly Reflection Questions...
In what ways is the story in Genesis 32.1-35.29 a story of conflict? In what ways is the story in Genesis 32.1-35.29 a story of reconciliation? What (very) human characteristics does this story reflect, even depend upon? How are these stories of God?

The Confession of Belhar

We believe

2 Cor. 5.17-21 that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt

Matthew 5.9, 13-16 of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells;

2 Peter 3.13 that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred,

Revelation 21.1-5 bitterness and enmity, that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;

Romans 6.12-14 that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;

Colossians 1.11-14 that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance of the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.
Confession of Belhar Questions...

Why do you think the authors of the Confession believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ?

How have we experienced God’s life-giving Word and Spirit within FPCC?

How does FPCC fulfill Jesus’ charge to be ‘salt of the earth’ and ‘light of the world’?

How do people continue be separated racially in the US, a land which is Christian?

Week Five: March 29-April 4

Pick a photograph and a story from the wall of the gathering space of the exhibition entitled: “RUST BELT NEW AMERICANS, A Showcase of Erie’s Refugee Population”, by Maitham Basha-Agha. Reflect on both what you see in the photo and what you read in the text that accompanies the photo. What issues of reconciliation are present in the photo? In the story?

NOTES on WEEK FIVE
Week Six: April 5-11

Larger Story: Genesis 37.1-36: Joseph Sold Into Slavery
Focus Story: Genesis 37.1-11: Joseph: Dreams/Long-Sleeved Coat

Genesis 37.1-11

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, “Listen to this dream that I dreamed. There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf.” His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?” So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying “Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, “What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?” So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Questions based on Genesis 37.1-36...

How do you understand Joseph’s comment in 37.16: “I am seeking my brothers...”?  
Who has been the dreamer(s) in your family? Within FPCC?  
How do you feel/what do you think about dreamers?  
What do you think about Joseph’s eleven brothers selling him to the Ishmaelites?  
What do you think of Jacob’s refusal of reconciling when receiving Joseph’s coat?

Questions based on Genesis 37.1-11...

What does the coat with long sleeves/many colors symbolize in this story?  
What does your study Bible suggest?  
Are there members of your family with whom you cannot “speak peaceably” with?  
What’s behind the rift?  
What do yo make of Joseph’s dreams?  
How do they remind you of other stories in the Jacob saga?

Weekly Reflection Questions...

In what ways is the story in Genesis 37.1-36 a story of conflict?  
In what ways is the story in Genesis 37.1-36 a story of reconciliation?  
What (very) human characteristics does this story reflect, even depend upon?  
How are these stories of God?
Week Six: April 5-11

Pick a photograph and a story from the wall of the gathering space of the exhibition entitled: “RUST BELT NEW AMERICANS, A Showcase of Erie’s Refugee Population”, by Maitham Basha-Agha. Reflect on both what you see in the photo and what you read in the text that accompanies the photo. What issues of reconciliation are present in the photo? In the story?

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The Confession of Belhar

We believe

Isaiah 42.1-7 that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;

Luke 6.20-26 that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged;

Luke 4.16-19 that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;

Luke 7.22 that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;

Psalm 146 that God supports the downtrodden, protests the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;

James 1.27 that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;

Micah 6.8 that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;

Amos 5.14-15 that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;

Psalm 82.1-5 that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore we reject any doctrine
which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.
**Confession of Belhar Questions...**
What verbs in the statements under “We Believe” strike you?
How do they do so?
Read Micah 6.8...how is this a mission challenge for the Church?
How do you define injustice? How have you experienced injustice in your life?
What do you believe is an act of justice FPCC is being called by God to embrace?

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**Holy Week: April 12-15**
Larger Story: Genesis 39.1-41.57; Joseph: Favor/Temptation/Imprisonment/Resurrection
Focus Stories: Genesis 39.1-6a; Joseph: Success
Genesis 39.6b-18; Joseph: Temptation
Genesis 39.19-41.13; Joseph: Imprisonment
Genesis 41.14-57; Joseph: Resurrection

**Genesis 39.1-6a**
Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer in his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph’s charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate.

**Questions based on Genesis 39.1-6a...**
The storyteller says that Joseph was a successful man because __________?
What “success” have you had in life because of God?
How is this a story of reconciliation?
Genesis 39.6b-18

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. And after a time his master’s wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, “Lie with me.” But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, she caught hold of his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and fled outside, she called out to the members of her household and said to them, “See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came into me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.” Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.”

Questions based on Genesis 39.6b-18...

What are the elements contributing to conflict in this part of the story?
What is Joseph afraid of?
Why do you believe this part of the larger story is necessary to be told?

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When [Joseph’s] master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, “This is the way your servant treated me,” he became enraged. And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph’s care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The chief jailer paid no need to anything that was in Joseph’s care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them; and they continued for some time in custody. One night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own meaning. When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. So he asked Pharaoh’s officers, who were with him in custody in his master’s house, “Why are your faces downcast today?” They said to him, “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.”

So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.” Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days; within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.”

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, “I also had dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head. “ And Joseph answered, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.”

On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand; but the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, and there came up out of the Nile seven sleek and fat cows, and they grazed in the reed grass. Then seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. The ugly and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. Then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them. The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream. In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.
Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “I remember my faults today. Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard. We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own meaning. A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each according to his dream. As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged.”

**Questions based on Genesis 39.19-41.13...**

How have you experienced the ‘steadfast love’ of the LORD in the midst of challenge or peril in your life?

How does this story parallel with the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26.36-56 and parallels)? With Jesus on trial (Mt. 26.57-27.31 and parallels)? With Jesus on the cross (Mt. 27.32-50 and parallels)?

There are three dreamers in this story: Cupbearer, Chief Baker, and Pharaoh (twice). Does it seem ironic to you that the dreamer (Joseph) is now a dream interpreter? Why or why not?

**Genesis 41.14-57**

Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. I fell asleep a second time and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me.”

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine. It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish though the famine.”
The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?” So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, “Bow the knee!” Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath—paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” The second he named Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.”

The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.” And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

Questions based on Genesis 41.14-57...
What do you think is God’s dream for Joseph? Israel? FPCC? You?
What might the seven lean cows represent in terms of FPCC?
What might the seven fat cows represent in terms of FPCC?
Who is like Joseph (41.38) within your life? Within the FPCC faith community?

Weekly Reflection Questions...
In what ways is the story in Genesis 39.1-41.57 a story of conflict?
In what ways is the story in Genesis 39.1-41.57 a story of reconciliation?
What (very) human characteristics does this story reflect, even depend upon?
How are these stories of God?

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2017
Lenten Bible Study Groups

Sundays (March 5th–April 9th)
~ 9:30 a.m. in the Fidelis Room of the Church, 250 West 7th Street (Downtown)—All welcome.
   Faith Formation option. Timm High, facilitator.

Mondays (March 6th—April 10th)
~ 7:00 p.m. at the Osborn’s home, 5031 Deerfield Drive, Fairview (West Side)—All welcome.
   Steve & Danelle Osborn, facilitators.

Tuesdays (March 14th—April 11th)
~ 7:00 p.m. at Calamari’s Squid Row, 1317 State Street (Downtown)—for women.
   Diane Sutton & Britney Knight, facilitators.

Wednesdays (March 1st—April 12th)
~ 10:30 a.m. in the Church Parlor, 250 West 7th Street (Downtown)—for all interested people.
   Timm High, facilitator.

Fridays (March 3rd–March 14th)
~ 7:00 a.m. in the Church Parlor, 250 West 7th Street (Downtown)—for men.
   Seph Kumer, facilitator.

*Watch the Sunday Bulletins for additional times & places to be added!!!
Our mission at First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant is:
To awaken all people to our need for a life-changing encounter
with the living Lord Jesus Christ,
and to encourage and equip each one
to become His fully-devoted follower.

The Congregation, in ministry
We are a Stephen Ministry Congregation

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