

The Path Chapter 4  
Genesis 25-50  
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The Rev. Bonnie Underwood

### Reconciling Conflict with God's Help

Today, we explore Chapter 4 of the Path, completing our journey through Genesis, the first book of the Bible, the story of Creation.

This Genesis story starts BIG. The cosmos, universe, the world, and all that is in it is created by God. Sin enters the world and Creation faces its consequences. We have a succession of stories about humankind, as the focus narrows onto a covenant people, the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And in the final chapter, we discover the beginnings of that newly created nation, the twelve tribes of Israel.

Last week we heard about Abraham and his complex family relationships. God promised to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars, but as the years continued to pass without a child, Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands. Ishmael was born of Sarah's slave Hagar and when Sarah did finally conceive and Isaac was born, we see family rivalry and discord. And this very human tendency continues with Abraham's descendants, with troubling results.

Abraham's son, Isaac, marries Rebekah and they have twin sons, Esau and Jacob. The twins incessantly struggle against one another, even within the womb. Rebekah had been told by God that the older son, Esau, would serve the younger. And the parents pick favorites: Isaac favored Esau, while Rebekah favored Jacob. Family rivalry in another generation.

Jacob tricks his way into receiving both his brother's birthright and his father's blessing, earning Esau's wrath, so he runs away, aided by his mother Rebekah, to a place of safety in the home of her brother Laban. Eventually Jacob leaves Laban's lands with his two wives Leah and Rachel, his 12 sons and 1 daughter, plus many flocks and possessions, to return to Canaan and reconcile with his brother Esau. Jacob has wrestled with himself, with others, and with God, who renames him Israel.

But difficult family relationships are not over, for Joseph, Rachel's first born son, was loved more by Jacob than any other of his children. He was the son of his old age; the son of his first love.

Just as we've seen divisiveness between Isaac and Ishmael, rivalry between Jacob and Esau, now there's enmity and discord between Joseph and his older brothers. Joseph's specialness isn't simply in his brothers' imagination. It's physically seen — seen in the gift of a magnificent garment given to only one of Jacob's 13 children.

And Joseph rubs it in. He not only runs around wearing his fancy robe, but he's also bragging about his dreams. Joseph shares with all the family that he's had dreams, seen visions, that they all will bow down before him. Youthful arrogance? Poking at his older brothers? Perhaps. Certainly a lack of awareness of how his words will be perceived.

And over time his brothers' resentment grows enough that they decide to get rid of him. His oldest brother Reuben has to talk the others out of killing Joseph, so instead they sell him into slavery. He's taken to Egypt and the cover-up begins when Jacob is told that Joseph had been killed by an animal.

Pride, impatience, arrogance, and jealousy — human emotions that can drive us towards evil and to sin against one another. And yet God is still with us, working for good. And God is with Joseph, surrounding him with God's steadfast love.

Joseph faces trials, struggles, and betrayals in Egypt, but when Pharaoh has dreams that no one can explain, Joseph is summoned and, with God's help, both interprets the dreams — 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine — and gives advice on how to respond. Pharaoh elevates Joseph to great power, to prepare all of Egypt for the famine to come, using his God-given talents.

With God's help, in spite of crippling circumstances, Joseph has grown in wisdom and strength, moving beyond the evil that has happened to him. His eyes are open to seeing God's blessings in his life, for Joseph is truly blessed and through Joseph, Egypt is also blessed.

All the while, Joseph's brothers have had to live with guilt and shame, witnessing the heartbreak of their father Jacob. Life has been hard, and as the famine extends beyond Egypt into Canaan, their lives become even worse.

The brothers must go to Egypt to obtain food and they unknowingly appear before Joseph, bowing before him as in that childhood dream. Joseph immediately recognizes them, but they don't recognize Joseph. And he tests the brothers to see who these men have become. Do they now regret their decisions? Have they changed from those who had betrayed him so many years before? And this fateful encounter leads to truth-telling, to confessions of sin, and the possibilities of healing.

With God's help, humankind can turn away from our natural tendencies towards rivalry, jealousy, and retribution, and instead turn towards reconciliation. With God's help, our human actions can be woven into God's life-giving purposes.

Through compassion, mercy, and reconciliation, Jacob and all his family are reunited, welcomed into Egypt, and given homes and lands. And Jacob, before his death, blesses all twelve of his sons, who become the twelve tribes of Israel. God's creation, God's renewal of life is ongoing. God acts so that life, rather than death abounds.

This ancient story about new beginnings, about hope and blessings out of tragedy, about possibilities of life out of despair, continues to speak to us today. I imagine that many of you, like me, were shocked by last Sunday's tragedy — so many injured and killed in Las Vegas. And there aren't really any more answers as to why today, than there were a week ago. Witnessing hate and destruction causes us to wrestle with our emotions, with fear, anger, and even despair. Or in our desire to fix the problem and stop the pain, we may jump to pointing fingers and casting blame.

But that is not God's way. I'm not suggesting that we should be passive and do nothing, but we are called to be gentle in our words and actions: to love, rather than hate; to forgive, instead of blame; to be still and pray, rather than anxiously wrapping ourselves in the frenetic voices of 24/7 news and social media. Blame and finger-pointing are not what we're taught at the foot of the cross.

Instead, we're shown that in God, there's hope. Bad things, evil works, can be redeemed to fulfill God's purposes. With God's help we can work together towards unity, opening ourselves to honest and civil dialogue to resolve our conflicts. We can and should continue to pray for our

leaders, while also communicating our desires that they too find ways to work together with respect and dignity, to seek justice and truth and resolve these complex issues than impact our lives.

I invite you to join me in the days and weeks ahead to be intentional with daily prayer, asking for God's help with the conflicts of our common life. For prayer is a call to action — it's the way we open ourselves to be part of God's solution and carry Christ's compassion, forgiveness, and love into the world.

Please join me in saying the prayer on page 824 of the Book Common Prayer. This is a prayer for *Times of Conflict*.

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.