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Lent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Jacob the Heel Comes Home”

When Rebekah (the wife of Isaac) gave birth to twin boys, the second child exited the womb clasping his older brother’s heel. Because of this he got the not-so-lofty name Jacob, which basically means “heel.” Now, you might think that with a name like that, little Jacob was destined to get walked all over by those around him! But think again. For, in fact, just the opposite was true – Jacob became quite adept at walking all over others, but always in a sneaky sort of way. Taking advantage of his brother; duping his old, blind father. But this trickery turned out to be Jacob’s *Achilles’ heel*, when he had to run away from home, run away from his brother, when all was discovered. And when he ran away, it was with little more than the clothes on his back.

At least, that’s the way it *looked*.

But actually, Jacob had much more than that, especially after his overnight stay at Bethel, which we heard about in the Old Testament reading this past Sunday. For there, in that place, God put His Word into the pocket of Jacob’s heart. His Word which said: “***I AM the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and yes, the God of Jacob as well.***” His Word which said: “***In you and your Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.***” His Word which said: “***I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.***” And with that Word, Jacob had not only everything that he needed; *he had everything*. Even as he walked away from home and family; even as he walked into his exile.

And the same is true for you and I, for God has slipped His Word of promise into the pocket of your heart as well. And it’s not just everything that you need; **it is everything**. We sang that two Sundays ago in Luther’s hymn: “*And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, Our vict’ry has been won; the Kingdom ours remaineth.*” (LW #298 v.4) It simply doesn’t matter how many figures are in your income, how big the roof over your head, or how fancy and new your car and computer. All that can vanish in the blink of an eye, in the spark of a flame, in the water and winds of a Katrina, in the vengeance of a brother or an enemy. And then what will you have? . . . Well, **still everything!** For these things are not your life! The Word is your life. The Word and promise of God that He put into the pocket of your heart. Or as St. Paul would later write: “***All things are yours,***

whether . . . the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

*The problem is, we don't believe it, do we? We fear poverty more than we fear God. We likely would have more joy winning a million dollar sweepstakes than all the joy we have ever had over the forgiveness of our sins. And where do we find the greater comfort: in our retirement savings, or in our Father's promise to help and support us in every physical need? . . . Jacob's not the only heel, is he? And not the only one who needs to repent. It is true that **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**. But it is equally true that **where your heart is, there will your treasure be also**.*

But why? Why do our hearts keep returning to the wrong place? Look at what a kind and gracious Father we have! Who has not only promised to feed you, clothe you, protect you, and be with you through thick and thin, but who has proven time and time again that He will! For what happened to Jacob, our fellow exile? He left home with little more than the clothes on his back, and he returns with more than a thousand pair of hands could hold – two wives, eleven sons, many servants, and huge flocks and herds of sheep and oxen and donkeys! The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob – our Lord Jesus Christ – blessed this exiled son. He keeps His promises, even to heels.

And to all of us heels as well. We have everything in the Word of God, and yet how much more has your Father given you? How well has He provided for you? He gives you family, puts food on your table, clothing on your back, shoes on your feet, money in your bank, a roof over your head, and for most of you, tons more! He who knows how many hairs are on your head – *easier for some of us than others!* – knows all that you need. And He not only promises to provide, He delivers the goods. All that you need, and then some.

But even if He should withhold one, or some, or many of these blessings, and suffering and hardship is what you face right now, remember – **you still have everything**. For greatest of all that our Father does for us is, just like Jacob, *He brings us home*. As He brought Adam and Eve back to Paradise in the sacrifice of Himself; as He brought Abraham and Sarah out of Egypt and back to Canaan; so after blessing Jacob through his twenty year exile, He prepares the way back to the Promised Land again. *And with a bonus*, one more blessing to bestow upon this son named **Heel** – He gives him a new name, an honorable and lofty name: **Israel**. And when Jacob returns, there is peace and forgiveness with his brother. Jacob – or rather, *Israel's* – exile had ended. He was home. Home again.

And so it has been done for you. For into this messed-up, mixed-up world of sin, where

brother sells out brother, children deceive parents, friends and enemies alike plot in anger and revenge, where coveting and greed are the name of the game – into such a world, the Son of the Father came down. To join you in your exile, to walk in your shoes, to accomplish for you what you couldn't even begin to accomplish for yourself. To take the sin of the world onto Himself. To absorb all the sinful thoughts, words, deeds, and desires of all of us heels. All our deception, trickery, betrayal, malice, hatred, and discontent. In mercy, He came into our exile and took our place, all the way to the exile of the cross, where naked, alone, abandoned, and forsaken, He took the **blame** for it all. He took the **condemnation** for it all. He took the **death** for it all. . . . For He who promises, provides! He who promised us a Saviour, sent His Son. He who promised us life, gave His life for us. He who promised us the way home, paved that way in His blood. So that just when the Viper of hell thought he had found and exploited the divine Achilles' heel on the cross, that heel came crashing down on his head, sending him into his exile! And bringing us home. Home in resurrection from the dead. Home in the forgiveness of our sins. Home to everlasting life.

And so He has brought you here, to your home, the land of Canaan called the Church. In the river of Baptism, He changed *your* name to Israel, for the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Israel, is *your* God, *your* Father. And He has given you everything. Not just everything that you need, but **everything**. For He has given you Himself. And in Him what do you lack? In Him, what *could* you lack? Though for now, for a while, it may look like you have little more than the clothes on your back, you truly have much more than that. For your Father has brought you home from exile, to His Promised Land of grace. Welcome home, Israel, my child. Welcome home.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.