

Anglican Parish of St James, Kingscliff and St Mark, Pottsville
Pentecost 8, 19th July 2026

Yesterday we gathered for a joyful celebration of the baptism of Kene Patrick Oschukwu, and during that service we prayed when Kene was anointed with holy oil, that he may come to the inheritance of the saints in glory.

Today I want to talk about a bit about promises and inheritance. A lot of promises were made yesterday, by Kene's parents and godparents but above all by God. And Revd Constantine spoke about what we inherit from our parents, including our good looks, if we are lucky, and other attributes, but the most important thing we can inherit is our faith. There is another form of inheritance that some people hope for, and we hear quite a lot about that in our current economic climate – the inheritance of wealth and property.

The story of Esau and Jacob continues this week. Last week we heard the story of their birth, and it seems that this was never going to be a happy relationship. It is mired in rivalry and the desire for inheritance and blessing. The boys struggled together in the womb even before they were born. Esau was born first, the son who was destined to inherit, and Jacob was born holding Esau's heel. Some have suggested that even at birth Jacob was trying to get ahead of Esau to be firstborn himself.

The boys were certainly not identical, either in looks, or preferences or personalities. One inherited the traits of this father, the other of his mother. Added to this, their parents played favourites: Isaac loved Esau and Rebecca loved Jacob. It is a recipe for family disfunction.

As firstborn Esau enjoyed the birthright but carelessly gave it away his birthright, or Jacob tricked him out of it, whichever way you look at it, for a

pot of stew when he was hungry. The Scriptures tells us that Esau “despised his birthright”, a birthright which entitled him to leadership of the family and a double share of his inheritance. He didn’t value it. He didn’t respect it. But then he wanted it back.

After that things went from bad to worse. Jacob, with his mother’s help, also tricked his father Isaac into giving him his blessing before he died, even though it should have gone to Esau. We might think that this is not a big deal – Isaac could have blessed both his boys, but the father’s blessing was an almost magical gift of prosperity that can only be given once. Like another form of inheritance.

When his brother found out what Jacob had done, again by trickery, Jacob had to flee for his life. It’s an awful story of deceit.

What is interesting is that it is in this context that God appears to Jacob in a dream and makes an incredible promise. “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.” It’s a promise of inheritance – the land will belong to you as I promised your forebears. It’s a promise of blessing – I will be with you always and keep you wherever you go.

The promise is not made because Jacob is deserving. He certainly is not. The promise rather reveals the purpose and nature of God – a purpose that cannot be thwarted by human endeavour or ambition or human unworthiness. God is a God who makes promises, and God keeps the promises that are made. “I am with you and will keep you wherever you go” is a promise made to all of us. Jesus repeated this promise to his followers when he assured

them that "I will never leave you or forsake you." God offers this same promise and blessing to all his children.

The ladder, or a better translation is 'stairway', emphasizes the connection between heaven and earth, a connection only God can make.

God reaches out to us.

None of us deserve to receive this promise. And yet we do.

We are all heirs of God's promise.

None of us has earned God's blessing. And yet it is given.

It's a mistake to think that God doesn't know what we are really like when these promises are made. To think that God cannot see beyond the façade we present to others.

It was lovely to hear part of Psalm 139 read by Sophie yesterday, and today we have another part. It answers all our doubts and fears and questions, and assured us that God does know everything about us. God sees into the depths of our hearts and our souls, our minds, our whole being, and loves us anyway.

O Lord, you have searched me out and known me:

you know when I sit or stand,

you comprehend my thoughts long before.

You discern my path and the places where I rest:

you are acquainted with all my ways.

For there is not a word on my tongue:

but you, Lord, know it altogether.

Once he has come to grips of the magnitude of this understanding, the psalmist wants to flee. He wants to run away and disappear. It is just too

much for him. This is not the result of the writer's guilty conscience. We see this same reaction elsewhere in the Scriptures.

When Isaiah sees a vision of God sitting on his throne in Isaiah chapter 6, his response is "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."

In Luke chapter 5, Peter falls at Jesus' knees and says to him, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' These are not expressions of unworthiness but arise from an overwhelming awareness of God, the reaction of one who trembles at the greatness of God. Jacob was the same when he woke up. He was afraid at the awesome presence of God.

The psalmist understands that he shares in the promise made to Jacob – that he cannot run away because God will be with him wherever he goes.

In heaven or in the grave, in life and in death.

If I spread out my wings towards the morning:
or dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there your hand shall lead me:
and your right hand shall hold me.

Even when we feel completely in the darkness, far away, so unworthy, so ashamed, so lost, there is no running away and hiding from God. This is what God promises. We are loved. In spite of everything, God will be there.

St Paul writes that we have been adopted as God's children. We can call God "Abba". Abba is an intimate word for father, like daddy but not quite. It refers

to a deep, affectionate and trusting relationship with God. Again, Revd Constantine spoke about this yesterday. Baptism into Christ means that we are part of a large family. We are brothers and sisters under Christ, and if children, then also heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. We are inheritors of the Kingdom of God.

Life in the Spirit is a life lived in relationship with God. It is a life of grace and hope. God adopts us as children. We inherit God's promises and God's blessing, again not because of anything we might do or achieve, but simply because of who we are.

The gospel tells another story about sowing seeds and the resulting harvest. It raises the issue of what we are to do as God's children, in this case the wheat, in a beautiful world, that is God's kingdom, when we live among those who are referred to as "children of the evil one".

Verna Holyhead, who writes commentaries on the Sunday readings, has pointed out that "the Kingdom of God takes root in imperfect communities, in both an imperfect church and an imperfect world. Even in the Twelve there was good and bad, loyalty and disloyalty, understanding and obtuseness – and we recognise this in ourselves as individuals and communities. Unbridled zeal that wants to create a pure and perfect community becomes intolerant fanaticism, which is not how the kingdom is established.... Patience is needed because the evil in a person's heart may be transformed into good by God's grace.

In 1 Timothy Paul urges us to pray for everyone, because God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The landowner is patient. In the strange world of parables, it may even be possible for weeds to become wheat.

Who are the children of the evil one and what should we do?

When we were driving here this morning we saw a number of people standing out in the rain with placards that read "Israel is a terrorist state". So is it Israel? Or Palestine? Or the Russians? The Iranians? The Muslims?

Transgender people?

We are to do nothing because evil is not always easy to recognise. It is widely thought that the weed that was sown in the farmer's field was darnel – a toxic type of ryegrass that looks exactly like wheat in its early stages. The similarity between these two plants is so great that in some regions, darnel is called "false wheat". Because their roots intertwine, attempting to uproot darnel mid-season risks pulling up the wheat as well.

The second reason is that in the parable we are not the reapers.

We are the wheat. The reapers are God's angels.

We do not see others as God sees them. We do not know the thoughts of others, we do not know the hearts of others, we do not know the intentions of others, we cannot see beyond the façade – either the evil or the good in others – and therefore we are not qualified for the job of sitting in judgment on others. If we try to, we are warned that we may do more harm than good.

There will be a judgment, but it is not now and it is not our task.

Our task is to live as God's people, God's children, and to bring to all people – good and bad alike – the good news of God's love and forgiveness, God's continued presence, and the possibility of receiving the inheritance that has been laid down for all who follow Christ.