



ST NINIAN'S UNITING CHURCH

JULY 22nd 2026

PRAYERS AND REFLECTION

Genesis 35:16-29

The Birth of Benjamin and the Death of Rachel

¹⁶ Then they journeyed from Bethel, and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor. ¹⁷ When she was in her hard labor, the midwife said to her, "Do not be afraid, for now you have another son." ¹⁸ As her soul was departing, for she was dying, she named him Ben-oni, but his father called him Benjamin. ¹⁹ And Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath, that is, Bethlehem, ²⁰ and Jacob set up a pillar at her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. ²¹ Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

²² While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. ²³ The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. ²⁴ The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁵ The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali. ²⁶ The sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

The Death of Isaac

²⁷ Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba, that is, Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had resided as aliens. ²⁸ Now the days of Isaac were one hundred eighty years. ²⁹ And Isaac breathed his last; he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days, and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

OPENING PRAYER

God of journeys and memories, you witness Rachel's sorrow and Isaac's final breath as your promises unfold. Today Lord, I pray for humility in grief, courage to bless the next generation, and reverence for sacred places. May loss become memory that unites, and hope that anchors your covenant with all people. In the name of the risen Christ Jesus amen.

PRAYER POINTS OF THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving for the gift of life and gift of family, even in times of grief.

Thanksgiving for the faithful who carry forward God's covenant through difficult times.

Thanksgiving for the comfort that comes from faith in the God who remains with you in grief, remembrance, joys and happiness from one generation to the next.

PRAYER POINTS OF PRAISE

Praise God for the continuity of God's promises across generations.

Praise God for the sacredness of places and memory (Bethlehem's significance)

Praise God for compassion in sorrow and grief and being present in life's pivotal moments of loss and transition.

PRAYER POINTS OF CONFESSION

It's time to confess: any fear of loss that leads to hardness towards the next generation

The times when sacred places, memories, or traditions that connect me to our long held faith traditions have not be respected, but ignored.

Being impatient with God's timing in painful times of my life (*God is with you in all things even to the end* (Matt 28:20))

WORDS OF GRACE

The Lord God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. Ex 34:6-7

REFLECTION

Genesis 35:16-29 reveals itself to be a journey of life and death or beginnings and endings where we feel the fragility of life while tracing the stubborn persistence of God's covenantal people. Rachel's death after the birth of Benjamin, becomes more than a personal tragedy as it signals the vulnerability embedded in the fulfillment of God's promises. The burial on the way to Bethlehem (Ephrath) we can clearly

connect that suffering happens no matter where are on God's map of life reminding us that sacred memory is always tied to place and movement, pilgrimage, exile, and a return. They aren't abstract ideas but lived experiences where faith and memory encounters history.

This passage doesn't just recount deaths, it also unfolds the story of faith continuing despite times of feeling pressured. Death interrupts life, but God's promises press forward through the birth of Benjamin and through the genealogical wake that follows. The covenant, which began with Abraham's faith and was renewed in Isaac and Jacob, persists through pain, delay and disappointment. In that tension with loss on one end, fidelity on the other, Genesis invites us to look at history through the lens of sacrament. God is at work in the ordinary, even tragic moments, weaving a forward-moving arc that sustains a people through generations.

Bethlehem's appearance as Rachel's burial site anchors the future messianic horizon within an ordinary landscape. Bethlehem isn't yet a cradle of salvation, here it's memory in motion where longing and action meet in the fidelity of a people. Machpelah, the family tomb, marks the gravity of lineage and the seriousness with which the patriarchs receive, guard, and speak about God's promises. These sacred places teach us that sacred memory isn't a nostalgic retreat but a discipline of perseverance, to remember appropriately is to align the present with God's continuing faithfulness.

Our reading for today also reveals a humble universality in the patriarchal economy. Jacob mourns, however he takes action by securing space for the next generation to live within God's story. The birth of Benjamin becomes a hinge, connecting Rachel's longing to the emergence of the twelve tribes. In our divided and boundary-crossing world, here Moses, (author of Genesis) is suggesting that peace doesn't come from the absence of conflict but from the patient maintenance of a shared memory and a common devotion to live under the covenant of God.

Ultimately the reading offers us an invitation to live in the tension of loss and covenant faithfulness with hope that God's promises outlives our sorrows calling us to honour memory, take care of the vulnerable and invest in what comes after us as participants in God's enduring but informative story.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Gracious God, giver of life and keeper of promises, in my quiet and peaceful time I bring my prayers for others before You. Grant comfort to those who mourn, especially in times when joy and sorrow collide, like Rachel and Isaac. May the memory of those who have died strengthen my faith and humility as I walk with the next generation.

Lord, form in me a steadiness of heart that seeks Your covenant even through grief and time. Help me to honour and respect sacred places and the stories of the ancestors, and to steward them for the good of future family and neighbours. Bind all our communities in empathy, so that age place of origin or faith doesn't divide but deepens our commitment to peace.

Bless the vulnerable, the unborn, the grief-stricken, and the weary. May my acts of care reflect Your steadfast faithfulness, sustaining those who bear heavy burdens and guide me toward opportunities for a restored relationship with you, reconciliation in broken relationships with others and unity for nations.

Lord of Bethlehem and Machpelah, bless all our streets and our places of worship with memory that disciplines us toward justice, compassion, and generosity. May the hope you planted in this reading through birth, sorrow, and legacy bear fruit in our actions, that we might live as a people faithful to Your enduring covenant. Amen.

a beautiful version of '**It Is Well With My Soul**'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwHs6zcGxrA&list=RDgwHs6zcGxrA&start_radio=1

