

Homily for Friday the Sixth Week of Easter
May 22, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Acts 18:1–8; Psalm 98:1–4; John 16:16–23a**

Since sheltering in place began in March, the friars and your parish clergy read Morning Prayer at home. We have this daily Eucharist at ten o'clock. For Evening Prayer, we gather according to the schedule we had before we were closed for public worship. On weekdays we pray Evening Prayer at six, weekends at five, here in this chapel.

For Morning Prayer I've been using the *Daily Office Book*,¹ a two-volume set of travel size books (four by six inches) no longer published by Church Publishing. There's a new one-volume, *Prayer Book Offices*.² I haven't seen a copy yet. Church Publishing's webpage doesn't have any information about what translation of the Bible is used or the size of the book—just the number of pages, 2,496. (There's actually more information about it at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0764809400)—and a significant cut in price.)

I'll continue to use the set that I have, because I haven't really used them very much. For some years

¹ *Daily Office Book* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1986), 2 vols.

² <https://www.churchpublishing.org/prayerbookoffices#>, (accessed 22 May 2020).

now, when I'm away, I usually pray from Derek Olsen's online Daily Office page called [Saint Bede's Breviary](#). It's very good and easy to use.

The Daily Office Lectionary is a two-year cycle. Since January the first reading in the morning, until this week, has been from Genesis, then Exodus, and then Leviticus. We have these lessons every year, alternating between morning and evening. The unfaithfulness of God's people in these first books of the Bible is relentless—and it continues in the Promised Land.

Most Fridays of the year our second canticle at Morning Prayer is one of three songs from Isaiah, called for the purposes of the Prayer Book, *The Second Song of Isaiah*. It's from the part of Isaiah written just before fall of the Babylonian kingdom that conquered Judah and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem to the kingdom of the Persians. It begins, "Seek the Lord while he wills to be found; call upon him when he draws near." My favorite verse is this, "Turn to the Lord, and he will have compassion, and to our God, for he will richly pardon."³

³ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 86.

Our gospels lessons since Monday have been from the sixteenth chapter of John, Jesus' last words to his friends before the final prayer John's Jesus makes to the Father—chapter seventeen, which we will begin on this coming Tuesday.

I like the way the editors chose to conclude today's appointed gospel, "So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will ask nothing of me."⁴

In so many ways I'm not a fan of Jacob or his family. But there's much to reflect on in his story. The two great things are Jacob's love for Rachel and the reconciliation of Jacob with his brother Esau.

After leaving and reconciling with his father-in-law, his mother's brother, and married to two of this uncle's daughters (his first cousins), Jacob sleeps a part from his family. He's not alone for the night. He wrestles with a man who turns out to be God—capital "G" or small "g"—the Hebrew text is ambiguous—who frees himself from Jacob's grasp by touching Jacob's hip and making him lame. Walter Brueggemann, in his

⁴ John 16:22–23a,

commentary on Genesis, writes that Jacob must deal with a God who cripples him and blesses him.⁵

In the morning, Jacob, now Israel (meaning “God will prevail”⁶) returns to his family and sees Esau and four hundred men approaching. Jacob goes ahead of his family and kneels and bows his head to the ground seven times as they approach his brother. Meanwhile, “Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.”⁷

One can say, I think, that when God touches our human lives, he leaves more than a mark, he comes, as John’s says, and dwells with us, giving us new life in our mortal bodies. We still have challenges and sorrows in this life, and no one knows this better than the who showed the wounds on his Risen body to one who doubted.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 270–71.

⁶ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996), 182.

⁷ Genesis 33:4.