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February 4th: Genesis 34 & John 18:1-27

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The humiliation of Dinah. Jesus taken in the garden; Peter's denials.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis 34. Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had born to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. When Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her.

And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, Get me this girl for my wife.

Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah, but his sons were with his livestock in the field. So Jacob held his peace until they came. And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him.

The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by

lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done. But Hamor spoke with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife.

Make marriages with us, give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.

Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, Let me find favour in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. Ask me for as great a bride price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife.

The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. They said to him, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. Only on this condition will we agree with you, that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised.

Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people. But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and we will be gone. Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem, and the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter.

Now he was the most honoured of all his father's house. So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city, and spoke to the men of their city, saying, These men are at peace with us. Let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them.

Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters. Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people, when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. Will not their livestock, their property, and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us.

And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city. On the third day, when they were saw, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure, and killed all the males. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away.

The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field, all their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was

in the houses, they captured and plundered. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household. But they said, Should he treat our sister like a prostitute? In Genesis chapter 34, Jacob has settled near Shechem and has bought a parcel of land from Hamor, the father of Shechem. The story of the actions of Jacob's sons in Shechem that follow in this chapter are troubling on various fronts.

Jacob seems to have put down some roots, he's bought a parcel of land, and now his daughter Dinah goes out to meet with the women of the land. We might have a sense of unease at this point. We've had a number of previous stories of women being threatened as they go out and relate to the people of the land.

We might think of the story of Abimelech just a few chapters earlier in chapter 26, where he says that one of the people might easily have lain with your wife. Now, if it's that easy for someone to lie with an unwilling woman, as presumably Rebecca would have been, it seems that these were not safe places for women to be wandering around, so we might have a reasonable concern for Dinah's safety. The chapter itself also sticks out in the wider context, so it's worth asking how it relates to the larger narrative as more than just a detached episode.

As usual, to understand such a text, it's helpful to consider parallel texts, literary structures, broader themes, narrative movements, and other features that help us to place it more clearly. One of the things that can help us here is considering the way that the story is transitioning from the story of Jacob to the story of Jacob's sons. And this story is focused upon the sons of Jacob and their sister Dinah.

The way Dinah is introduced to us, though, is important. She's described as the daughter of Leah. Not the daughter of Jacob, but the daughter of Leah.

And later on we'll see this play off the fact that she is Jacob's daughter, she's also the daughter of Leah, and Simeon and Levi are described as her brothers. Now why is this important? Leah is the unloved wife, and the favouritism that Jacob has for Rachel over Leah is something that's playing out in the next generation already. His seeming lack of action or concern for the rape of his daughter Dinah is seen by his sons, quite legitimately, as a failure to take concern for their side of the family.

Ironically, they are in certain ways playing out something that Jacob himself experienced. Jacob was the unfavoured son himself, and now we see Jacob failing to break that cycle of favouritism. He has his own favoured side of the family, and he's failing to act on behalf of the unfavoured children.

There are a number of stories of women in the book of Genesis being taken from their families by people of the land without consent. Sarai is taken by Pharaoh, and later by Abimelech. Rebekah is almost taken by Abimelech, as we've discussed.

Dinah can be placed within this larger pattern. Shechem lies with her, but he also abducts her. And it's not entirely clear whether this is a case of rape or seduction, and the ways that we would characterise rape are not necessarily the ways that it would be characterised in Scripture.

So we have to be very careful of anachronistically reading our categories into the text. We have laws in Scripture that deal with these different sorts of situations in Deuteronomy 22, 28-29, and in Exodus 22, 16. We also have other stories like that of Tamar and Amnon in 2 Samuel 13, which speak of similar situations.

In the story of Amnon and Tamar, there is a case of rape, and Tamar sees the failure to actually regularise this relationship in some sort of marital arrangement as a compounding of the original sin or wrong that Amnon did to her. The fact that a victim of rape would actually want her rapist to marry her and see the failure of the rapist to marry her as a compounding of the wrong done to her is something that can be very difficult for us to understand. And so we do need to get inside the mindset of the culture to understand where exactly they were coming at this from.

Now while we know that the wronged woman had the right to veto any such arrangement, as did her father, and there was a duty to pay a price on the part of the rapist whether or not any relationship resulted, holding the rapist responsible to actually take the wronged woman as his wife was one of the possible resolutions of the situation that could be proposed. When thinking about such passages in scripture we need to be aware of a number of things. First of all we need to be aware of reading back our principles into the text in a way that fails to reckon with the world of the text itself and how that world operated, what the limitations that existed within that world were, and how the laws actually spoke to reality on the ground.

But on the other hand we need to resist the temptation to lightly cover over the difficulties of the text, not actually to do serious business with them. So these are questions that we need to wrestle with. We shouldn't just shrug them off.

We need to consider them carefully. In my experience the more that you deal with these questions carefully the more satisfying and illuminating any possible resolution will be. Returning to the story in Genesis chapter 34, Jacob hears about the action of Shechem but he holds his peace.

His son's here and they are incensed. Shechem has done an outrageous thing in Israel. This is an expression that we find elsewhere in the story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Samuel chapter 13.

It's a strange thing to encounter here, to talk about an outrageous thing in Israel. It almost seems anachronistic. Israel just has 12 children at this point that we know of.

Benjamin has not yet been born. And so to speak about this as an outrageous thing in Israel is to speak using the corporate name of the people when even Jacob is generally just called Jacob at this point. He's not yet called Israel on a regular basis.

This expression is found in a number of places in scripture generally used of some sexual offence. And in just about every occasion where it's used the person of whom it is spoken ends up losing their life because of their actions. Hamor and Shechem strike up negotiations.

Hamor desires a more political alliance between the clan of Jacob and the Shechemites whereas Shechem's concern is to get Dinah. Jacob's sons propose that the Shechemites get circumcised which will enable them to intermarry and form a collective people group. Hamor and Shechem then pitch that arrangement to their people as a political alliance with no mention of Dinah's part in the story.

They give the suggestion that this will actually be a means by which they can take over the possessions of Israel. And Jacob's failure to stand up for his daughter Dinah leads to a breach in the family at this point. You should note the similarity with David again who is displeased with Amnon for his actions towards Tamar in 2 Samuel chapter 13 but fails to take any action.

And the result of that is that Absalom takes vengeance for his sister and there is again a breach within the family that results from that. Dinah, as I've already noted, seems to have been abducted, taken into Shechem's house and this puts Jacob and his sons in a weaker bargaining position. Hamor and Shechem hold the key card and it's very difficult perhaps for Jacob and his sons to stand against them.

Which seems to be one of the reasons why Jacob's sons use deceit at this point. They use a plot using the covenant sign of circumcision as a means of strategic warfare. So they get the Shechemites to circumcise themselves and when they're still in pain and disabled as a result of the circumcision, they attack and they seek to destroy the Shechemites and their city.

They deliver Dinah and bring her back. And at this point Jacob rebukes them for putting him and his people in a precarious position. And they challenge their father, though not as strongly as they might have done, for his failure to stand up for their sister.

Note that they do not give the stronger accusation that they might have done if they said, should he treat your daughter like a prostitute, rather it's our sister. At this point we may be seeing something of the divide in the family, that it's Simeon and Levi that will actually stand up for Dinah, not Dinah's father. Dinah's defining parent is Leah, rather

than Jacob.

And Jacob just does not seem to be acting on her behalf as he ought to do. This then is a passage in which we're seeing some of the cracks within the family of Jacob and the tensions that exist between the father, between the unloved sons and the favoured son, as we'll see later on in the story of Joseph. Levi and Simeon, the two brothers, are later judged for their actions in Genesis chapter 49.

And Jacob talks about them hamstringing an ox. What do they mean by hamstringing? Well, it seems to be a reference to what they do to Jacob, that he is the ox that is hamstrung by their action. The word for hamstrung and also the word for bringing trouble upon Jacob seem to be a play on words.

And here there is an association between their actions and the status of the ox, Jacob, within the land. Some other scholars have proposed that this story lies behind the restriction on yoking an ox with an ass. Hamor means ass and Jacob is associated with the ox and so they should not be unequally yoked.

That symbolic commandment then is a commandment against intermarriage. Looking at this passage we may see some other things as well. Some patterns that we saw in the story of Jacob being played out in the next generation.

We have someone who wants to marry a woman and will do anything to marry her. And then the marriage agreement not being able to be fulfilled for some reason. The use of deceit to get the desired end.

And the way in which this plays out reminds us of Jacob himself in certain respects. Jacob's sons are using the same sort of tactics that Jacob himself employed as the unfavoured son. And then also in other respects they seem to be playing parts that are similar to Laban.

As a final question to reflect upon, how might some of the associations, comparisons and similarities between the story of Jacob and the actions of his sons in this chapter help us to understand what's going on here and how it fits into the larger narrative. John chapter 18 verses 1-27 Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, Whom do you seek? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am he.

Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, whom do you seek? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus answered, I told you that I am he. So if you seek me, let these men go. This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken.

Of those whom you gave me, I have lost not one. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

So Jesus said to Peter, Put your sword into its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.

But Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl, who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you? He said, I am not.

Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

Jesus answered him, I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.

Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. They know what I said. When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, Is that how you answer the high priest? Jesus answered him, If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong.

But if what I said is right, why do you strike me? Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, You also are not one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not.

One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, Did I not see you in the garden with him? Peter again denied it. And at once a rooster crowed. John 18 describes the betrayal, capture and trials of Jesus leading up to his crucifixion.

His crossing of the brook Kidron should be related to David's crossing of that same brook in 2 Samuel 15 verse 23 during Absalom's coup. A number of the Gospels explore this background for thinking about the betrayal, the arrest and the death of Christ. Christ,

like David, is retreating from Jerusalem.

Like Absalom, the ruler of this age seems to have had his great triumph. His coup seems to have been a success and David is leaving the city. Judas in these stories is like a Hithophel.

He's the one who gives counsel to the opponents of the king. And Jesus, as he crosses over the brook Kidron, ascends the Mount of Olives. He's playing out this story of David again.

And each of the Gospels explores this in slightly different ways. Thinking of the angels ministering to him, the various people that are met, and the background of Abishai, who is the right hand man to David, who wishes to strike down Shimei, who's cursing David to take off his head. There are parallels there with the story of Peter, Peter who attacks the high priest's servant.

In these parallels then we're seeing Jesus portrayed as the greater David, replaying the story of David, but on a grander scale. Not just dealing with the coup of one of his sons, but dealing with the ruler of this age himself. Jesus enters a garden, which obviously carries all sorts of biblical resonances.

There will be another garden later on, connected with the tomb, and in Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene. Once again, playing upon the Old Testament background, the background of the Garden of Eden itself. Jesus answers those coming to arrest him with highly significant words, I am.

The same words that he uses of himself in chapter 8 verse 58. And they draw back and fall to the ground. This is a response to him using the divine name.

Once again we see very strong Christology coming through in the Gospel of John. Jesus' words in verses 7-9, where he speaks about none of his disciples being lost, and his concern to protect his disciples, show his commitment to suffer on behalf of the disciples and protect them even as they abandon him. The disciple who attacks the high priest's servant isn't mentioned in the other Gospels, but here we are informed that it is Peter.

David Daube has suggested that an attack upon the right ear might be intended as a disqualification for priestly ministry. Whether or not this is the case, and I'm not entirely sure, Malchus could be thought of as Peter's opposite number. Both are servants of a high priest.

Peter is the lead priestly assistant to Jesus, a fact that is particularly significant from this chapter onwards in John. And the sort of laying down of his life that Peter has in mind, something that is mentioned in chapter 13 verse 37, is this sort of thing. Actually fighting for Christ and being willing to die in that conflict, he's less prepared to lay down his life in the manner that Jesus actually requires of him.

Jesus is said to act to fulfil the word that he has spoken, of those whom you gave me I have lost no one. That language of fulfilment connects Jesus' words with those words of Scripture, that Jesus fulfils his own word like he fulfils the words of Scripture itself. He must drink the cup that the Father has given to him.

He must take that burden of judgement and punishment upon himself. The cup that belongs to Jerusalem and Israel for its sins, the Messiah is going to drink as the King of the Jews. Simon Peter sort of serves as a leading priestly figure among the disciples.

And while Jesus is being tried before Annas and Caiaphas, Peter is denying Jesus in the high priest's courtyard. There's an important parallel and contrast being established. Peter stands around the fire of coals and note that there is also a fire of coals when Peter is restored in chapter 21 verse 9. The other disciple, which many have presumed to be the disciple that Jesus loved, was known to the high priest as we see in verses 15 and 16.

He seems to be well positioned, have good connections and access. Could it maybe be someone like Lazarus or would it be Joseph of Arimathea or would it be Nicodemus? We're not entirely sure. We can speculate.

Many have seen this as the disciple that Jesus loves, the one who writes the Gospel. Jesus is questioned but Peter is questioned at the same time, heightening the contrast between them. Jesus' I am's contrast with Peter's not me.

Peter is questioned by the servant girl at the door, primarily about his association with Christ's disciples. Then by the servants and the officers warming themselves by the charcoal fire. And then finally by one of the high priest's servants, a relative of Malchus.

And Peter's denial, along with the entrance into Jerusalem, is mentioned in all of the Gospels. This is a very significant event. Peter is very clearly not the hero of the story, nor are the other disciples.

Jesus is the only hero of this story. And the failure of Peter helps us to recognise that he is not the person that we're supposed to be looking up to primarily. He has his flaws, he has his failings.

Note also that Peter is questioned about not just his direct association with Christ, but his association with the disciples of Christ. We might fancy ourselves, if we were in the position of Peter, that we would stand up for Christ. That we would associate with him readily, that we would speak on behalf of the one who is our master.

But yet, like Peter, we can so often be quick to dissociate ourselves from his people. To deny that we have any affiliation with the church when it embarrasses us, when it limits the degree to which we can fit in with the crowd that surround us. Like Peter, we can be tempted to deny Christ in denying our association with his people.

A question to reflect upon. Jesus almost exactly repeats the first words that he speaks in the gospel. For whom are you looking? Or what are you looking for? And he makes this statement twice in this chapter.

And he repeats the exact same question to Mary Magdalene in chapter 20, after the resurrection. The repetition of this particular question suggests that it is an important one for the evangelist. The evangelist wants to think about our relationship to this question.

How we might respond to it as the readers of the gospel. What response should an attentive reader of John's gospel give to this question?