

Advent Resource Kit  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

### **In the Waiting Room of Reconciliation: An Advent Reflection**

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Read: Genesis 32:9-12

*9 And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,' 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. 11 Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. 12 Yet you have said, 'I will surely do you good and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number.' "*



The meeting has been set. Now all that remains is the encounter. As the appointed time nears, you notice that you feel ripples of heat coursing through your body. Little beads of sweat form on your brow and above your lip. Your hands are clammy, and your mouth is dry. You get up from your chair and pace. Your breath catches in your throat when you think you hear the door open; it is only the fan kicking on to circulate the heavy air around you. *Maybe it's not too late to leave*, you think. *Maybe I can skip this meeting altogether*. Except you cannot. You have wronged someone else, you have acknowledged it, and you have set this meeting to apologize, ask for forgiveness, and begin to walk the uneven, uncomfortable path of reconciliation – making things right again.

This is the situation in which Jacob finds himself. He has wronged his brother Esau. The prospect of facing Esau's wrath terrifies Jacob. Jacob enriched himself using trickery and deception, yet the cost of such deceit is more than he can reckon. So, when God tells Jacob to return to his home after a long, although exceedingly blessed, exile, we would understand if he refused and made excuses for why he could not go. Amazingly, Jacob obeys. Not that he had much choice; Jacob, as he did with Esau, played the huckster with his uncle Laban, and now his cousins are out to get him, too. Jacob finds himself between the rock of staying with relatives bubbling over with fresh anger and the hard place of running toward his brother's smoldering rage. Wisely, he opts to go where God tells him. Jacob trusts in God's steadfast love and faithfulness, even as his knees knock and boots quiver at the thought of the reception that awaits him. With fear tempered by obedience and a smidge of struggle, Jacob looks outside of himself, calling on God and begging for deliverance.

During Advent, we prepare for our deliverance to arrive in the birth of Jesus Christ, who comes to take away the sins of the world. Our hopeful anticipation of the Savior springs from the reality that we, like Jacob, have employed trickery and deceit. We have strayed from the paths of righteousness and embraced sinfulness to secure for ourselves pleasure, comfort, and acclaim. Facing the consequences of our actions, separation from our Creator, we, like Jacob, have no other choice than to abandon our propensity to shrewdly plan and humbly turn to God in prayer. Fortunately, also like Jacob, we can boldly assert that God will surely do us good. With such an assertion, our Advent cry for deliverance can prepare us for God's transformative power. Reconciled with God and neighbor, our cries of deliverance

can become shouts of praise: “I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears . . . . This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him” (Ps 34:4-8). Amen.