

New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio



COME TO NEW LIFE!

A Sermon for the 9th Sunday after Pentecost
July 26, 2026

Rev Barbara Bond

[Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Genesis 29:15-28

Journey through life

The Odyssey is in the news! This brand new movie from Christopher Nolan is in all the movie theatres and is packing in crowds, excited to see the latest iteration of this ancient story interpreted by one of the film geniuses of our day. The film is new, the story is very old. The Odyssey tells the story of the title character Odysseus (sometimes called Ulysses) as he journeys back home after ten years of the Trojan War. As with most stories of journeying, this one is about the process, not the goal. Odysseus runs into all sorts of temptations, conflicts, and challenges on his way home to Ithaca. Many of the incidents have come down to us as expressions which we may not know the source of. Have you been caught between a rock and a hard place? That's like Odysseus trying to get through the narrow passage of Scylla and Charybdis. Have you been tempted by some siren call? Have you been challenged by someone who seems like Cyclops incarnate? Again, that's the Odyssey story. Written down by Homer in the 8th century BC, it has become a part of the fiber of our lives and our stories.

It is rather like the story of Jacob. Jacob's story is the Biblical equivalent of the Odyssey, Jacob who begins his life in conflict with his twin brother Essau (even in the womb!) and struggles to find his way. Last week we heard about an encounter with God and a vision of angels traversing earth and heaven. If Jacob had been paying attention, he would have seen more than an angelic vision, rather a plan for his life and the life of his people. But of course Jacob hadn't matured enough to get the message, and so this week we find him in the next stage of his profligate life. He has run away from his family of origin and has moved in with a relative named Laban. And wouldn't you know it, Jacob falls in love.

Ah! The beautiful Rachel, Laban's daughter! Surely she is destined to be his wife! Jacob speaks with her father Laban, who is a bit wily. Jacob may have met his match in wiliness here. Laban approves the match if Jacob will work for him for seven years. Seven years! A drop in the bucket! Of course he'll work seven years to win the hand of Rachel!

A slight digression on Biblical numbers. The Jews were great at many things, but numbers weren't their strong suit. The numbers that are cited in scripture are not real numbers like we are used to. Bible numbers are symbolic of the passage of time in meaningful ways. Take, for example, the number 40. Let's see now...divide 40 by 7 days, 7 times 6 is 42, so that's a little less than 6 weeks, right? Wrong. In Bible-speak, forty days means a long time. That's all. It is a familiar number to Bible readers: 40 days of rain for Noah and the arc, forty years of the Israelites wandering the desert, forty

days of Jesus fasting in the wilderness. Anyway, numbers in the Bible definitely have meaning, but not in our literal sense.

And so it is with the number seven. Seven in our culture can mean literally seven – seven days from now, or seven years ago. Are our lives divided into parcels of seven years? Perhaps – I can look at my life and see lots of patterns which frequently are periods of seven years. Many markers of life in our society echo these time divisions – at age seven, children have a real jump in their intellect. At about 14, many children enter puberty and for Jews, mark the transition with Bar or Bat Mitzvah. At 21, many people are getting married and entering a significant change in their lives, and our social laws enforce the idea with the legal age for drinking and voting (somewhat modified in recent years). Anyway, seven is a real number in terms of life changes. I'll bet you can relate.

So what about Jacob? He has reached a major juncture in his life. It is time for him to get married. And he just met the most beautiful woman in the world. What's seven years in the great scheme of things? It was like a few days. Jacob did the work, and there was a big wedding. Laban was not finished with his wily tricks. With a slight of hand, he substituted his older daughter Leah in the marriage bed, and Jacob discovered the switcher Roo the next morning. He was not happy. But Laban gave him Rachel anyway and asked that Jacob work another seven years. I'm sure she was worth it!

The story is not over. Jacob endures many more challenges, the most meaningful of which will be recounted in next week's reading, the battle with the dark angel. Stay tuned!

These stories are so rich and meaningful. They are companion stories for our own lives. They are in our Bible for a reason. Even though Jacob was on his own wily way, cheating as he went, he was actually working for God. He is in the lineage of Abraham and Isaac, and God promised great growth of God's people through this genealogy. Jacob may have just been looking out for himself, but he had 12 sons through Leah, Rachel, and their handmaids, who are stand-ins for the tribes of Israel. Perhaps in the story of the Jews there were difficult times that called for guile and trickery. But the hand of God was with Jacob and his offspring, and it is with us. Ah, that we could have such trust.