

**Sunday, July 23, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**“Shine Like the Sun”**  
**Genesis 28:10-19a and Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What images come to your mind when you hear ‘the sun’?”

**Genesis 28:10-19a. Context.** Last week’s reading recounted the births of Esau and Jacob, their struggle even at birth and Jacob’s taking advantage of his starving brother to secure his birthright. The injustice didn’t end there. Rebekah conspired with Jacob, her favorite, to take from Esau Isaac’s blessing as well. For this, Esau hated Jacob and swore to kill him. So Rebekah decided it was best that Jacob clear out of town, Beer-sheba (in the south), and had Isaac send him north to her family in Haran to find a wife. In this week’s episode, Jacob received on his journey the promises from God that had first been given to his grandfather, Abraham. Jacob had a vision of a “ladder,” but think staircase or ramp like those on Mesopotamian temples and ziggurats that symbolically connected earth and heaven. Jacob called the site “Bethel” which literally means “house of God.”

**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. Context.** This week’s parable is generally called the parable of the wheat and the weeds (aka, the wheat and the tares). It draws again on an agricultural image to make a point about the final judgment and how we are to prepare for it. As with the parable of the sower and the seeds/soils of last week’s reading, Jesus shares with his disciples, only after the crowds were gone, an allegorical interpretation of the parable.

**Read Genesis 28:10-19a and Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

**Read Genesis 28:10-19a and Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Why was Jacob running away? What do you think Jacob felt as he left everything behind, went to the unknown place, and had a dream about God, who assured him that God was with him? Have you had an experience where you were lost, yet you felt God’s blessing/presence/assurance?

[My story – I grew up in Japan, and I came to the U.S. to attend college. I did not know anyone; I did not speak English, and I did not know God. I was lonely and struggled to

survive college life, yet God provided people to care for and love me; most of all, they showed me what Christ was like. That led me to believe in Jesus. Now when I face new challenges or unknown situations, I am comforted—due to my earlier experiences of God—to know that God will always be with me. Praise God!

- In the parable in Matthew 13, who is traditionally seen as the one who sows the good seed? What is traditionally thought of as the field? Who are identified as the good seeds? The children of the Who are the weeds? Where do you see yourself in the story? Those of you who are gardeners or take care of lawns, have you ever had difficulty discerning what you wanted to grow from what you didn't want to grow? When you read a phrase like, "the enemy planting bad seeds," how do you picture that dynamic? Some traditions consider the enemy as Satan or a force acting for evil. Some traditions consider the enemy more ambiguously as "sin" or unethical behaviors that plant bad seeds in the world.
- "We Christians don't have a perfect record throughout history on that one. We were sure that women weren't as valued in God's kingdom as men. We were sure that white skin was a better guarantee of entrance into heaven than black or brown or yellow or red. We were convinced that what Jesus wanted was to make everyone like citizens of the USA, or the West, or the developed world, and that cultural expressions of faith had to be uniform no matter where you lived. Now we are embarrassed to have held these views. We couldn't always tell what was a weed and what was wheat. And the parable also tells us that even when we do know, pulling out the weed can do more damage than leaving it alone."
- What is your reaction to this reading? How do you perceive the coexistence of good and evil: the reality that good and evil exist together in the world? What do you believe this parable calls people to do concerning caring for the world and one another?
- "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!" (Matthew 13:43) How does the promise of shining like the sun reflect God's love and favor? How might we share the light of Christ and shine like the sun in a world filled with darkness and evil? What might you need to do this week, so you are the children of the kingdom who will shine like the sun in the kingdom of God?

### **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Gracious God, we come before You with hearts open to receiving wisdom and truth.

Like Jacob, we may find ourselves in unfamiliar places, facing uncertainty and doubt. In those moments, we ask for Your assurance and strength. Help us to trust in Your faithfulness and promises, knowing that You are with us wherever we go.

As we reflect on the parable of the wheat and weeds, grant us discernment, Lord, to recognize and resist the deceptive influences of the evil ones. Help us shine as beacons of Your light, spreading love, compassion, and righteousness in a world longing for Your truth. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.