

**Sermon for Sunday, July 30, 2023**  
**Ninth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**“Love for the Real World”**  
**Reverend Amy Zalk Larson**  
**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**  
**Decorah, Iowa**

[Click here to read the Story for July 30](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Have you been hearing the buzz about the Barbie movie? I never imagined I'd talk about Barbie in a sermon. However, when your yoga instructor tells you that you have to go see a movie about a plastic doll, you pay attention. When that movie is also recommended by the Shepherds of your Flock, Luther and Lise, whose professions are organizational consultant and English professor, you pay attention.

And when five different friends, in one week, send you the text of a monologue from the movie about the impossibility of being a woman, you pay attention. I haven't seen the movie yet, but it is definitely hitting a cultural nerve. And maybe because I've been hearing about it all week, the Barbie movie has helped me think about Jacob and his messed-up family. In the movie, Stereotypical Barbie lives in a perfect, plastic world until she has an existential crisis and decides to enter the Real World. The characters throughout the story of Jacob's family definitely live in the real world of their time - not a lot of perfection on view.

Jacob and his twin brother wrestle so much in the womb that their mother wants to die. They come out fighting, with Jacob holding on to the firstborn twin Esau's heel. Jacob tricks Esau out of his inheritance and then deceives his father into giving him the blessing that should have gone to the firstborn Esau. Jacob has to flee Esau's murderous rage. Then Jacob's uncle Laban tricks him into marrying Laban's firstborn daughter Leah when Jacob really wants to marry Rachel, the beautiful one. Jacob doesn't even realize he has married the wrong daughter until the morning after their wedding night. What's up with that?

Some of the troubling parts of their story are related to that culture - like Jacob marrying two of his cousins and women being treated as property. Some still persist today, especially the emphasis on how women look, and some are because this family has serious issues. ***Jacob*** has serious issues.

I often marvel at how realistic and honest this story is. You'd think in describing the origins of their faith, the Jewish people might have tried to clean up the story a bit, made their forebearers seem a little more appealing, done a little filtering? After all, these aren't just any forebearers - these characters are intimately connected with God throughout scripture. God is often introduced as the God of Jacob, and the God of his father Isaac and his grand-

father Abraham. You'd think people mentioned so often in the same breath as God might be spruced up a bit for public consumption? Instead, we see these folks just as they are, warts and all.

When we're tempted to try to clean up our origins and our stories as a country, as communities, as families, scripture points us in a different direction. **The witness of scripture, and apparently the Barbie movie, is that it's better to face the truth, face the real.**

I wonder if Jacob is forced to face the hard realities of his life when he comes up against Laban. The trickster, the deceiver, is tricked and deceived. The man who stole what was owed to the firstborn is thwarted by other cultural norms for firstborns. Does Jacob have to wrestle with this all during the fourteen years he works for Laban? He certainly has to wrestle with God in a story we'll hear next week. Jacob eventually reconciles with his brother Esau. Facing the truth of his life seems to prepare him for that reconciliation.

All of God's people are called to the work of reconciliation, work that involves honestly addressing the realities of our world and our lives. Jacob lived in an unjust, messed up culture. He also responded in less than honorable ways. Our culture is messed up and unjust in its own ways. How will we respond to it all? How will we live? In what ways can we work for reconciliation?

What are the truths about our individual and collective stories that we need to face? The Barbie movie holds up a mirror to many of them, especially gender roles, the objectification of women, patriarchy, materialism, consumerism. I hope you'll read the monologue from the movie that is resonating with so many women right now.<sup>1</sup> I'll put a link to it in the text of the sermon.

The racial justice work that we're doing as a congregation includes facing the truths of our origin stories as a country and as Lutheran Americans of mostly European descent. We're learning about the role Lutherans played in American slavery and the displacement of indigenous peoples. We're asking how Dylann Roof could grow up active in an ELCA congregation and then go on to kill nine Christians at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina;<sup>2</sup> and why is it that the ELCA is the whitest denomination in the country. We're wrestling with our white privilege and the ways we're shaped by white supremacy culture.

The witness of scripture is that wrestling with all of this prayerfully, together as the people of God, will lead to transformation, reconciliation, and healing. It's hard work to address all these harsh realities. Yet we don't face them alone. Christ Jesus has entered into all that is painful and hard in our world, even into death. He has faced it all and overcomes, rising from death.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.elle.com/culture/movies-tv/a44640422/america-ferrera-full-barbie-monologue/>

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3134689/Dylann-Roof-devout-Christian-baptized-Lutheran-faith-went-church-camp-regularly-attended-Mass-reveals-pastor-family-attend-church-services-pray-massacre-victims.html>

Now nothing in all creation - not our own failings, not the brokenness of our world, not hardship or suffering or death - can separate us from the love of God. We are held secure in that love. That love is what is most real and true for you and for me.

This love provides our true identity - beloved child of God.

This love accompanies us, transforms us, forgives us, and raises us up, again and again.

Nothing is perfect in this world except the love of God.

You are loved, forgiven, and set free to live with love in our real world.