

## Sermon Sept 21, 25: Esau and Jacob trickery

Sorry you're getting 2 Unverferth sermon's back to back, but last week, Mike gave a sermon on Abraham and how he was asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac in chapter 22 of Genesis. We now jump ahead to chapter 27 and 28, so here's what we missed. Sarah dies and Abraham bought a piece of land to bury her in. Abraham ages and decides to become matchmaker for his son, Isaac. A servant was asked to return to Abraham's homeland with instructions to find him a suitable wife. The servant prayed and was led to Rebekah who agreed to go back with him where she married Isaac. She became pregnant, but she asked God about the struggle that she felt in her womb. God told her that "The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your OLDER son will serve your YOUNGER son." When the twins were born, Esau came out first, but Jacob close behind as he was grasping Esau's heel. So, significant information from this part: Rebekah interprets God's words to mean that God's blessings should be for the second born and not the first, however, in Hebrew, the translation can go either way. Either that the "elder son shall serve the younger son", or "the elder, the younger shall serve". Esau means hairy, so that is why he was so named, but he was also known as a hunter, impulsive, and loved by his father, Isaac. The Hebrew name for Jacob means "He will follow", "supplanter", "heel grabber" or "may god protect." So, in these definitions of his names there is a nod towards walking behind another, a figurative meaning of seizing another's place and there being a divine safeguard. He was also known to have a quiet temperament and loved by his mother, Rebekah, but also known as a trickster. In Chapter 25, he convinced Esau to sell his birthright when Esau came in famished and Jacob refused to feed him unless he gave his birthright benefits to him. Wow! Either Esau didn't care about the benefits or he was really, really hungry!!!!

Now, we're up to Chapter 27. It starts out so sweet, with an aging Isaac wanting his son Esau to go hunt wild game, bring it back, and share a meal with him. We then jump ahead and miss Rebekah becoming the mastermind behind a devious plan. While Esau is out hunting, she tells Jacob that Esau will be blessed so he needs to deceive his father and get the blessing, that she thinks is God's will, instead. She tells him to go get a goat for her to prepare and she'll take care of the rest. That's where we catch back up and find her also using the goat skin to put on Jacob's skin so that he "feels" like Esau as well. They play the trick on Isaac and he falls for it!!! Really? Apparently, he had poor eyesight, but how could he not tell the difference between goat and wild game? He was surprised at the short amount of time it took for him to hunt, but he dismissed that. He thought he recognized the voice as Jacob's, but dismissed that. However, when he felt the skin, he suddenly convinced himself that it was indeed Esau and gave the blessing to Jacob, unknowingly.

One commentary I used to prepare my sermon talked about seeing the humor in this whole situation. The boys were twins. . . .born immediately after one another. . . .was Esau to get everything because he came out 10 seconds sooner than his brother? Are we really to believe that Isaac couldn't figure out that he was being tricked? He was given 3 facts against it being Esau, but he weighed one fact higher than the others and was tricked. That may be hard to believe, but how often do we deceive ourselves when the evidence proves otherwise. It shouldn't be humorous, but unfortunately, we can all be

blinded by things happening in the world because of the news we watch, who we listen to, and how big our blinders are to hide other points of view. From a spiritual sense, how often do we convince ourselves that we don't need to come to worship, to pray, read the Bible, or help those in need? One personal reflective practice would be to spend some time thinking about whether or not my judgment is supported by the facts or by what we desire as Isaac did, whether we try to get things for those we love and deception is in our toolbox as it was for Rebekah, if we get mad when we don't get what we think we should have like Esau, or if we are a trickster like Jacob and try to manipulate to gain advantage.

Ancient Israelites practiced Primogeniture: giving certain privileges, such as inheritance and a special blessing, on the eldest son. Then, and now, there are certain cultural expectations which somehow dictate what one can receive, how they are perceived, and how they are allowed to live in the world. Many of us may see these as entitlements, things that we believe we are owed or deserve to have. It often comes up in relation to skin color, gender, income, or career. Are we able to see this or are we blinded by our own willfulness and give into deception and manipulation? Are we able to see right versus wrong, something being ethical or not? Are we manipulating God's words and looking for that one thing that somehow makes us think our actions are validated? Are we making the world a better place or causing harm to others because we think we are entitled, ranked higher than someone else?

As Christians, we can also wrestle with the fact that Jacob and his mother schemed up this deception, but yet, Jacob was blessed by God. In Chapter 28, we read how God was going to bless Jacob. "the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring, and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go . . . ." God often gave blessings to people in the Bible who didn't deserve it according to societal norms, but as we know, God's greatest gift was given to us all in the form of Jesus Christ and grace.

Getting back to Rebekah, why did she do this? It likely goes back to Rebekah's interpretation of God's words. She really thought that Jacob, her favorite, was entitled to the first Born's blessing and she was willing to do whatever she had to to make sure that happened. Do we ever really know God's Will? Are we willing to take ownership of the role we play in making meaning of God's Word and then in applying God's word through action? The Bible is ancient and diverse with authors spanning centuries, cultures, and historical periods. Translations from original Hebrew and Greek texts have introduced subtle changes in meaning leading to varied interpretations. We all approach the Bible from our own unique background, cultural context, and experiences. As readers of this book, are we using it to give us and others hope, love, and faith or using it as a weapon against others? How much does trickery and humility play into this. Can we be thankful that we have money in the bank, but yet not lose sight of the fact that many don't have a bank account and give support to those less fortunate than us? Can we thank God for the food on our table, but at the same time remember those who aren't being fed and donate to the food bank? Do we thank God that we have people in our lives who love and respect us

just as we are, but at the same time remember those who are being bullied, called names, dehumanized, or made to feel unworthy because they are “different” and don’t “fit societal norms?”

The final point has to be with identifying with the trickster for humor and hope? The value of a trickster found in folklore from enslaved African Americans was written in an article by Zora Neale Hurston during WWII. The trickster was known as Old John or Brer Rabbitt in songs or stories. He came out of difficult situations by “making a way out of no way” and adding in laughter and hope when he did not. Hurston wrote “he was really winning in a permanent way, for he was winning with the soul of the black man whole and free. So, he could use it afterwards. For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul? You would have nothing, but a cruel, vengeful, grasping monster come to power.” In other words, the author went on to say that a people without the power to prevent their suffering crafted stories and songs that, through, laughter and hope, helped them hold onto their humanity.” Sometimes we need a good laugh and a glimmer of hope from stories like Jacob’s trickery, combined with God’s solidarity and unconditional love for us all. That way, we can survive and not lose our soul.

In conclusion, this story had lots of different angles, many different lens to look through. I often say that I don’t know the answer to how God would see something, so I error on the side of love and say I’ll find out when I get to heaven. The Blessing that God gives us all. . . the blessing we are entitled to as a Child of God is that God loves us all and, even when we are deceptive, manipulative or make wrong choices, God still finds ways to work through us and bless us.

God loves you and so do I. Amen