

September 24, 2017
Genesis 27:1-4; 27:15-24; 28:10-17 Reflections on Jacob & Esau

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 27:1-4

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.”² He said, “See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death.”³ Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me.⁴ Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die.”

PSALM

Psalm 39: 4-6 (Merrill)

O loving Presence, You are with us to the end,
whatever the measure of our days;
our life passes by as the blinking of an eye!
For the gift of life fades too soon away,
yet how precious are we in your sight!

REFLECTION

That I May Bless You

At this point in this ancient Old Testament story of faith, Isaac, the first born of Abraham and Sarah, is drawing near to the end of his life. It is time to pass the blessings of Abraham to the next generation. There is poignancy here, “When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim... he called to his son. “It is time... it is perhaps past time for passing the blessing of Abraham to his firstborn son.

As the eldest, Esau is destined to carry forward the divine promises to the descendants of Abraham. So, Isaac calls Esau to him to prepare for the moment when he will lay his hands upon him and speak words of blessing over him.

The responsibility of carrying the blessing and promises of God forward are: to rest with Esau, who is to become the patriarch of Abraham’s ever-growing web of descendants.

Passing on the mantle of one’s inheritance and authority is often a tricky business. If there are tensions amongst family members, they tend to show up—sometimes in spades! Isaac’s family is no exception!

Isaac has two sons-- Esau and Jacob.... Esau is born first, by a whisper, with Jacob quick on his heel-- I mean with one hand literally grasping onto Esau’s heel! The two are as different as day and night. When you think Esau, think Viking... rugged, muscular and strong, red-haired and hairy, impulsive and earnest. Think Jeep Wrangler.

When you think Jacob, think dark, handsome, smooth-skinned, refined. Think intelligent and shrewd. Think Mercedes Coupe! Esau is preferred by his father, Isaac. Jacob is preferred by his mother, Rebecca. Esau, marries, twice, to foreign women--thorns to the spirits of Isaac and Rebecca. Jacob remains single—his mamma’s boy well into middle age.

This seriously dysfunctional family has clearly inherited more than Divine blessing from Abraham and Sarah—and not all of it - good!

And maybe that is the point of the story.... the good news, if you will. That this far-from-perfect, seriously dysfunctional family, in a long line of dysfunctional families are both inheritors and conveyers of Divine grace and blessing. Unhealthy family dynamics, it seems, don’t deter God in the least from bringing blessing to and through them into the world.

Perhaps we can take hope from this ancient tale. Is it possible we don’t need to be perfect in order to be blessed? – is it possible that we need not have it all together to bring blessing to others!

Perhaps we simply need to be ready to receive the blessing and be willing to carry it forward-- into our lives and into our relationships wherever, and amongst whomever we find ourselves.

★HYMN

Take, O Take Me As I Am

MV 85



Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;
Set your seal upon my heart and live in me.

OLD TESTAMENT*Genesis 27:15-24*

¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; ¹⁶ and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ Then she handed the savoury food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob. ¹⁸ So he went in to his father, and said, "My father"; and he said, "Here I am; who are you, my son?" ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me." ²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the Lord your God granted me success." ²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." ²² So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." ²³ He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him.

PSALM*Psalm 39:7 - 9 (Merrill)*

Surely your Plan for us is written on our hearts!
 Surely your angels stand ready to guide us on our way!
 Surely there is nothing to fear, for You abide with us;
 You await patiently for us to awaken to your Love"

REFLECTION*Unsettling Blessings*

This passage reminds me of a scene from a childhood fairy tale, "But grandmother, what big eyes you have!" "The better to see you with, my dear." "And grandmother, what big ears you have!" "The better to hear you with my dear!" "And grandmother, what big teeth you have!" "The better to eat you with, my dear!" And the wicked wolf leaped out of bed and ate Little Red Riding Hood all up. Yikes! Do you hear a strange echo here.

After her father died, they gathered in a large circle of family and friends. Her too long absent, younger brother was finally present, but their step-mother, whose vision was growing dim, had not yet seen him. She called out, "Is Jim here?" Others responded, "Yes, Mary, he's here."

"Where? Where is he? Where's Jim?"

Jim called out, across the circle, "I'm right here, Mary."

"I can't see you!" she said, "Come here so I can see you."

Her brawny brother leapt to his feet, strode across the circle, stood in front of her chair. "I'm right here Mary." "Good," she said, "Thank you for coming. I'm glad you're here. Your dad would be so glad you came." "Okay, you can go sit down."

Eyes around the circle twinkled and danced in silent laughter!

But truly, Jim might have been anyone! Mary would not have known the difference.

So it is that Isaac blesses the wrong son!

Cataracts on his eyes, hearing aids on the fritz, numbness in his hands, and an aged brain prone to confusion-Isaac isn't so difficult to deceive. Jacob, rather than Esau, receives his father's blessing. And, what is done is done. The blessing cannot be rescinded. Jacob, and not Esau, is to be the carrier of the Divine lineage. Jacob, and not Esau, is to wear the mantle of the patriarch. Jacob, and not Esau, will be responsible for carrying into the future, the blessings and promises of God to the people of the world.

Is Jacob worthy? Is he a person of good character? Is he man of integrity? Maybe not... but he is shrewd. And, maybe shrewd is what God needs in that moment in history... who knows!

I wonder what we are to take from this story? Is it possible, do you think, that the ability of God to bless others through us is not totally dependant on the calibre of our character? It's a bit of a relief if that is the case, don't you think? Why, God might even bless others through the likes of you and me. Now that's a thought!

★HYMN*Take, O Take Me As I Am*

MV 85



Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;
 Set your seal upon my heart and live in me.

OLD TESTAMENT*Genesis 28:10-17*

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹² And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the

angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And the Lord stood beside Jacob and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" ¹⁷ And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

PSALM *Psalm 39:7 -11 (Merrill)*

And now, O Loving Friend, for what do I wait?
My hope is in your guidance.
Forgive me for all my mistakes;
let me not walk in ignorance
I stand silent before You, I hold my tongue;
to you I turn in repentance.
Remove the blemishes from my heart;
for I am weary of guilt.
When you blot out the darkness of sin,
burning it with refining fire,
surely I am made new, redeemed by your Love

REFLECTION *Imperfect Vessels*

Jacob is running for his life. Esau has vowed to kill him for his deception--vowed to kill his cheating twin for robbing him of the blessing rightfully his as the eldest son.

Rebecca has packed Jacob's bags and sent him to the protection of her brother's clan until Esau's anger subsides. Many years will pass, much will happen before the brothers fall into one another arms in joyous reunion, before we will hear Jacob bow to his brother and say, "To see your face is like seeing the face of God."

Before that can happen, there is many a life lesson these two men must learn. The truth is we learn by making mistakes. We live life forward, but we understand it only looking back. Only then do we see the seemingly wrong turns we inadvertently made. This discovery is sometimes our greatest moment of moral truth.

Jacob's lessons begin in earnest with his suddenly having to flee his home and family. Long accustomed to the guidance and protection of his mother, and on his own for the first time, Jacob needs a word from God. The weight of the ill-gotten blessing that he carries lays heavily on him. He wonders how he has gotten to this place in his life, and what the future can possibly hold for him. He wonders how he can go on.

I suspect many of us have had moments in our lives when we have wondered these same things. For Jacob, it is this dream that propels him forward. It is this dream that reassures him that he is not alone on his journey—that God will go with him and will continue to bless him; and, that one day he will return to this place and belong to it, even as it now, in some strange way, already belongs to him.

For Jacob, this is the place of Divine encounter, the space of grace, the house of God, the gate of heaven. In this moment Jacob is no longer Rebecca's boy fleeing for his life. On this day, Jacob steps into his manhood and begins, in earnest, the journey towards the life he is destined to live—baggage fully in tow.

What about you? In the midst of your times of fear and loneliness, have you met angels along the way? Have there been voices to reassure you, redirect you, and assist you in turning towards the life that God has in store for you? Have you found yourself standing and gaping in amazement saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place!" "Who knew? Who knew such a thing could be possible?"

★HYMN *Take, O Take Me As I Am*

MV 85

 Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;
Set your seal upon my heart and live in me.

PSALM

Psalm 39:12 -13 (Merrill)

Hear my prayer, O Listening Heart,
give ear to my cry; wash away my tears
with your peace!

For I am but a passing guest,
a sojourner on this earth.

Look upon me with mercy, that I
may know the joy of living in the realm of Love,
now and in the Life to Come. Amen.

Sung Response

Amen

VU 974



Amen, amen, Hallelujah, amen!

Amen, amen, Hallelujah amen!

The Psalm readings are taken from Psalms for Praying, Nan C. Merrill Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., New York, © 2007.

The Sung Response is from More Voices, Composer: Linnea Good, 2005, Word: Keri K Wehlander, 2005