Sermon copyright © 2011 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Pentecost Proper 10A
Peace, Seattle
July 10, 2011 epk
Genesis 25:19-34

FOR BETTER OF FOR WORSE

Throughout July and August our First Testament readings will trace the story of our Biblical patriarchs and matriarchs as they live out their destinies within the frame of God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah. We get a view into our extended family history...and an uncensored one at that!

In fact, for me, what makes these stories so compelling is the fact that they're given to us warts and all. And because of this honesty, we're somehow encouraged to let down our guard a little, to see our selves, and the whole human tribe—with its full spectrum of light and shadow—between the lines of these ancient tales.

But why have these stories—which trace human missteps and tragedies as well as acts of generosity and faithfulness—why have they been preserved—why are they "Scripture"?

Entertaining as they sometimes are, they haven't been passed down from generation to generation purely for their entertainment value (though they can be that!), but rather because there is something in them that speaks of how God deals with the most enigmatic creature in creation. Frustrated as the Lord may become, he never throws in the towel with the human family. God is in this relationship "for better or for worse," and, at least in Genesis, it's mostly for worse.

Good thing God has a sense of humor!

- Seventy-five year old Abram and his post-menopausal partner Sarai are promised "descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky"…laughable!
- When their long awaited son Isaac (whose name means "laughter") finally is born, God orders Abraham to give him back in a mountaintop scene straight out of an Alfred Hitchcock suspense film…crazy weird!
- Later, when a bride—Rebekah by name—is secured for Isaac, and it turns out that they have trouble getting pregnant too. Isaac prays and—Hallelujah!—Rebekah conceives. Now after all that fretting hand wringing, it wouldn't be too much to expect an easy pregnancy, would it? Apparently so… For Rebekah's pregnancy turns out to be a civil war, with one brother grasping for what the other has from the very get-go.

  "Here," writes Jason Byassee, "is the family of God in all its gory detail: prayer and miraculous conception, yes; but also brothers who fight from conception, parents who divide their loves, a supplanter from birth who offers his own brother a sort of anti-Eucharist, a meal that sunders and grasps for the self at the other's expense. [Yet] it is precisely here, among these people where God works to save the world."[1]

I grew up in a household of six brothers—two of whom are twins. When our lesson talks about brothers getting each other's goat, I know what that's about. My younger twin brothers have bodily scars documenting their skirmishes with each other.

[1] Jason Byassee in *Feasting on the Word, Proper 10, Additional Essays.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press) 2011.

Sermon copyright © 2011 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

And when my brother and I got in a tiff, mother's solution was always the same: either (a) she would banish us to the garage where, left to our own devices we could work out a solution, or (b) she would sentence us to the same room for the rest of the day with only each other as playmates.

Not the parenting solution you'd find in RAISING EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT CHILDREN but it more or less worked.

In today's story we hear of twin brothers Esau and Jacob—two nations, struggling for first position. And we watch while the seed of future battles is sown as Jacob grasps Esau's heel on their way into the world.

First born ESAU has many skills. Loved by his father, he's a man's man who can hunt and trap with the best of them. By tradition, as first born, he's set to inherit the lion's share of his father's estate. But Esau has a weakness, too—he is a slave to his appetites. When he stumbles into camp one day, famished from his foray in the field, Jacob seizes the moment, and wins his brother's birthright for a bowl of stew.

Esau is a figure that just might resonate with all of us who, at one time or another, have made decisions that we later come to regret deeply.[2] If only we could have that moment back again! Turn back the clock!

JACOB, the clever younger brother isn't a bad guy. In fact, he's gifted in many ways—not the least of which is his skill in the kitchen. (If you want a list of his other attributes, just ask his doting mother.) But he is no way content with being #2, and honing a different set of skills, he becomes a manipulative people-user who is willing to sacrifice any relationship, as long as doing so gets him where he wants to go.

These, then, are our spiritual ancestors, held up today for our edification. (HA!)

Yet, are they not emblematic of God's proclivity to choose "what is weak in the world,"[3] and those who are, in various ways, wanting, in order to spread his blessing around? **This is most certainly true**.

God could have chosen to start over again…but God had already tried that once---in the flood---and found the whole experience wanting.

No, if God was determined to throw his weight behind the progeny of Abraham and Sarah, (and God was)… and if God was determined to spread blessing across the world through these characters come hell or high water, (and God was)…THEN God would have to be willing to go to any length required IN ORDER to keep that hope, that promise, alive. And that's exactly what happened.

If we recognize any part of our own family history in the tale of these two brothers and their parents, it is not coincidental. It is Scripture's way—God's way—of reaching across the centuries into our lives and saying: YOU, TOO, CHILD, AS RAW AS YOUR LIFE MAY BE, AS MIXED AS YOUR MOTIVES INEVITABLY ARE, YOU ARE MY INSTRUMENT FOR BRINGING BLESSING TO THE WORLD.

---

[2] Casey Thompson in *Feasting on the Word, Proper 10, Additional Essays.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press) 2011.
[3] 1 Corinthians 1:27

Sermon copyright © 2011 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

You matter to God. And God means to keep his covenant with you, a covenant finally written in indelibly in the flesh and blood of Jesus. For better or for worse. That's the plain truth of it. Thanks be to God. Amen.