

## **Genesis 25:19-34 New International Version (Schocken Bible)**

19 Now these are the begettings of Yitzhak, son of Avraham. Avraham begot Yitzhak.

20 Yitzhak was forty years old when he took Rivka daughter of Betuel the Aramean, from the country of Aram, sister of Lavan the Aramean, for himself as a wife.

21 Yitzhak entreated YHWH on behalf of his wife, for she was barren, and YHWH granted-his-entreaty: Rivka his wife became pregnant.

22 But the children almost crushed one another inside her, so she said: If this be so, why do I exist?

And she went to inquire of YHWH.

23 YHWH said to her:

Two nations are in your body, two tribes from your belly shall be divided; tribe shall be mightier than tribe, elder shall be servant to younger!

24 When her days were fulfilled for bearing, here: twins were in her body!

25 The first one came out ruddy, like a hairy mantle all over, so they called his name: Esav / Rough-One.

26 After that his brother came out, his hand grasping Esav's heel, so they called his name: Yaakov / Heel-Holder.

Yitzhak was sixty years old when she bore them.

27 The lads grew up:

Esav became a man who knew the hunt, a man of the field, but Yaakov was a plain man, staying among the tents.

28 Yitzhak grew to love Esav, for (he brought) hunted-game for his mouth, but Rivka loved Yaakov.

29 Once Yaakov was boiling boiled-stew, when Esav came in from the field, and he was weary

30 Esav said to Yaakov:

Pray give me a gulp of the red-stuff, that red-stuff, for I am so weary!

Therefore they called his name: Edom/ Red-One.

31 Yaakov said:

Sell me your firstborn-right here-and-now.

32 Esav said: Here, I am on my way to dying, so what good to me is a firstborn-right?

33 Yaakov said: Swear to me here-and-now.  
He swore to him and sold his firstborn-right to Yaakov.  
34 Yaakov gave Esav bread and boiled lentils;  
he ate and drank and arose and went off.  
Thus did Esav despise the firstborn-right.

### **Romans 8:1-11 New International Version (NIV) Life Through the Spirit**

**8** Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you<sup>[a]</sup> free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh,<sup>[b]</sup> God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.<sup>[c]</sup> And so he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

<sup>5</sup> Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. <sup>6</sup> The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life<sup>[d]</sup> because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of<sup>[e]</sup> his Spirit who lives in you.

### **Matthew 13:1-9 New International Version (NIV)**

#### **The Parable of the Sower**

**13** That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup> Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was

scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

<sup>18</sup> “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. <sup>20</sup> The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>22</sup> The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>23</sup> But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

### Sermon. -

Sometimes we think of people who have impressed us in their faith walk and marvel at how exceptional they are. Eric Liddell, the Scottish Olympian who dedicated his adult life to mission work in China comes to my mind. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who resisted the Nazis comes to mind. Albert Schweitzer, the missionary doctor who dedicated his life to serving the people of Africa, comes to mind. My Dad comes to my mind. A good man I knew in Williamsburg, Mayo, comes to mind. We could continue to make a list of such people who seem exceptional to us. This morning’s text, however, tells us something very different and something that is consistent through Scripture – God

routinely chooses people we see as unexceptional to do His work. In fact, as in today's Genesis reading, the people He chooses are beyond unexceptional – they might be people we would cross the street to avoid.

Our Genesis text, continuing the story of the patriarchs, opens with circumstances which are very human and, at first blush, seem at odds with God's promise to Abraham. Rebecca, the woman who has become Isaac's wife, is unable to conceive. This seems to put Isaac and Rebecca into the position that Abraham and Sarah had found themselves in pre-Ishmael. Isaac goes to God in prayer, asking that Rebecca could conceive and God responds – Rebecca becomes pregnant with twins. She is concerned by the jousting that seems to be taking place in her womb, asks God about it and is told that the twins will give rise to two tribes. Most notably, he also tells her that contrary to the cultural norm, the elder of the twins will serve the younger. God breaks the world's conventions.

Today's text continues as the twins are born – Esau first followed by Jacob holding onto the heel of Esau. As they grow up Esau is a manly kind of guy who lives to be out in the wild, hunting. This makes him a man after Isaac's heart. Jacob sticks closer to home and is Rebecca's favorite, whether biased from what God has told her or simply because Jacob spends time with her. On a typical day Esau has been out hunting and Jacob at home cooking. Esau returns, famished, and asks for food. Jacob offers it if Esau will give up his birthright – renouncing his privilege as the eldest to inheritance. At this point Esau seems to be a drama queen, saying that he will die of hunger and so what good is the inheritance if he dies from hunger? I wonder if it may also be that Esau figures that what he says doesn't matter since, as Isaac's favorite, he is the son who will receive Isaac's blessing. So, though the text uses the phrase that Esau despised his birthright, perhaps in our terms it is something a bit different. Rather than saying "I despise this" it seems to me that Esau really was just being cavalier – callous - taking the birthright for granted. He knew that he was the eldest, that he was

Isaac's favorite and wasn't concerned. The world was his. So, we have Esau either being unable to compare long term and short term consequences and truly not caring about his birthright or he felt privileged and figured he could get the stew plus not give up his birthright later.

Perhaps we are more like Esau than we like to think. That we have a birthright in our faith and God's grace and, knowing that God's love and grace are ours forever, aren't concerned about how we serve God in this His good Creation. For sure, we must also understand that Jacob is not a heroic figure. He connives and manipulates to get what he wants. What we see in today's text is modest compared to what he will do later.

The point in this reflection on the very inadequate or malicious natures of the brothers isn't to malign them, it is to point out what this story is really about. It is not about Isaac, Rebecca, Esau or Jacob. It is about God. God has chosen Abraham and his offspring through Isaac and Jacob to serve as His witness to the world so that the world will know of Him, the one true God. He has not picked the Eric Liddell of the time, but someone far more lacking in character and instincts. If it were an Eric Liddell, we might think that the good that comes from this legacy of Abraham is from the people themselves, but given such a cast of cavalier, deceitful people we have to see that, left to their devices, their legacy to the world would be one of sin, either of commission or omission. Since that is not their legacy, the outcome is about what God has brought about through these very inadequate, flawed people. Not only does that underscore the hand of God at work, but it also gives us hope that just as He blessed those very flawed people, He blesses us – despite ourselves. On any given day it could be said that we – as individuals and as a peoples – despise our birthright just as Esau did. We are cocky and certain of ourselves. On too many days we display the manipulative behavior of Jacob (and Rebecca). Thanks be to God that still He chooses us and works through us for the good of Creation.

Paul's writing today continues this thought. Paul expresses thanksgiving that because we are in Christ we are freed from the

behavior of Esau, Jacob and Rebecca. But, if that was the end of the discussion it would be a cause for despair and not hope because while we express our faith and belief, too often we act otherwise. It's like the Navy adage, that 1000 attaboys would be wiped out by one oh-no. We may be piling up attaboys, but we have too many oh-no's and, as a result, left to and judged on our own merits, we are doomed.

Jesus' parable today in Matthew's account makes the point in yet another way. When the sower goes out to cast the seed, the seed is all equal. Each throw may be equal. Yet, the results are very different based on where the seed lands – on what God causes the seed to do. I do not want to take this too far because we get mired in Predestination issues, but suffice it to say that the sower's throw and the seed that is thrown are all intended to do well. Yet, only some seed flourishes and that is a function of the hand of God – where the seed lands. It is not about the seed quality or the sower's arm, but about how God chooses to use that particular seed. This is important because we have to recognize that all of the seed is equal and that it is not the fault of a particular seed that it does not show excellence compared to its compadre that landed on the really good soil. Simply put, each is doing what God has given them to do.

There are impressive botanical gardens we can enjoy, like the one over at Boothbay Harbor. Or roadside Maine all around us with the lupine, daisies, black eyed susans and daylilies blooming. The plants there are beautiful. If you were to take a trip to the desert southwest you would rarely see such colorful beauty. Instead, you would see various cacti growing out of the sand and rocky soil. Lots of brown. We would be tempted to say that the beauty around us is so much more than that of the cacti, but we would be forgetting that the cacti are doing their Providentially ordered thing, just as the lupine are.

This morning's lesson, then, is not about the particular qualities of the family of Isaac, or poor soil compared to good soil. Rather, it is about

what God chooses to do in each one of us. The challenges to each of us are to embrace what it is that God has given us as our part in His good Creation while also – and this may be more important and difficult on any given day – recognizing and appreciating that what the person across the room or parking lot or wherever is doing is their Providential blessing and mandate. This does not mean that Jacob's manipulative behavior is to be copied – rather, that God used Jacob despite that incredible fault – and so it is with us.

One final caution – God's grace and our faith in it does not remove from us the consequences of our actions. As we will see in the weeks to come (feel free to read all of the remaining story of Jacob on your own since not all of it will be in our Sunday lectionary) Jacob ends up reaping what he sows – both in the near term and the long term. God's blessing does not desert him, but he does have to deal with – in some difficult ways – what he sets in motion with his behavior that very decidedly violates Judeo-Christian tenets.

We are blessed by God's grace. Alone. We receive that grace through faith. Alone. We have that grace through Christ. Alone. We learn of that grace through Scripture. Alone. All for the purpose of glorifying God alone. Amen.