

NEW VISION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
1600 Mangrove Avenue, Suite 177
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11:00 -- Sunday Celebration Worship

“Family Values: The Twins REALLY Aren’t Getting Along!”

Preached by: Jim Peck, Pastor

Bible Reading: Genesis 27: 1 – 45

Will you pray with me? Holy God, may we know the light of your truth this morning as we open our hearts to your Word. Amen.

Last Sunday, we heard about the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac favored Esau, who was the older son by a few minutes. Rebekah favored Jacob. Esau, being older, was entitled to inherit his father’s estate, and receive his father’s blessing. Jacob, being younger, might get something from the estate, and a secondary blessing, because that’s how it worked. The oldest son got the bulk of it.

But, when the twins were yet in their mother’s womb, God had told Rebekah the younger would rule over the older. She did not share this message from God with her husband.

And, one day, certain he was about to starve to death, and thinking only about the moment and not about the future, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for some food, some red lentil stew.

Esau did not tell his father about this transaction, possibly because he did not want to upset his father, more likely because he did not think it was important enough to tell.

Jacob, though, apparently told his mother.

For now the day has come, the day of reckoning, the day when the deception must be played out. Isaac is about to die. Isaac is ready to give Esau his birthright and his blessing.

The birthright is a material transaction, the passing along of accumulated wealth to an heir. Genesis characterizes Isaac as a man of prosperity, with land for growing crops and pastures for grazing flocks. Genesis 26 says he owned four wells, a sure sign of wealth in a land where water was scarce.

These wells have names - Ezek, Sitnah, Rehoboth, and Beersheba. As the story unfolds over generations, the well at Beersheba proves to be the most important. But I like “Rehoboth” the best, for the name means “The Lord has made room for us.”

Isaac is also characterized as a man of faithfulness to God, and as a man of peace, at peace with himself, and at peace with those around him. He is described as blessed in two ways. Through the eyes of the world, he is blessed with prosperity.

Through the eyes of faith, he is blessed by God as the fulfillment of God's promise to Isaac's father Abraham and mother Sarah that the whole world would be blessed through Abraham and Sarah's son. Isaac is the evidence, at least the first generation evidence, God is fulfilling God's promise.

But what is a blessing?

A blessing is a gift. From a faith perspective, a blessing is a gift from God for the current moment, a gift from God for now, that reminds us of God's unending graciousness and generosity towards us.

A blessing is a fulfillment, for this moment, of the promise God has made to us about our whole lives, the promise that our whole lives are held in God's tender embrace.

Of course, I believe that when we count our blessings, we will soon run out of numbers. When we stop to count our blessings, as if God's graciousness and generosity have limits, when we stop to count them, the important thing is not the counting. The stopping is the important thing. It is all too easy to be moving just fast enough that we do not see the blessings, the gifts from God that surround us.

Lent is the season for stopping.

Isaac, then, is ready to give the gift to Esau, the gift that belongs to the oldest son. Here is that blessing, in Genesis 27: 28 - 29:

May God give you of the dew of heaven,
And of the fatness of the earth,
And plenty of grain and wine.
Let peoples serve you,
And nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
And may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be everyone who curses you,
And blessed be everyone who blesses you.

But, of course, without realizing it, Isaac has bestowed this blessing upon Jacob, not Esau. His wife, Rebekah, and his younger son have deceived him. The lentil stew trade is fulfilled and, curiously, the message God gave Rebekah before her twins were born, comes true.

And, friends, Isaac has only one blessing to bestow. He cannot take his words back, undo the deception. Words once flung into the world cannot be taken back, cannot be undone. They can be explained, amended, regretted, affirmed, forgotten, but they cannot be undone.

The lasting nature of words is precisely what gives them so much power in our world and in our lives. The power of words is precisely why we should consider carefully our words.

Esau now regrets the words he said to Jacob that day by the stew pot. It appears he had forgotten them until this moment. By the stew pot, desperate for food, afraid he would die, he thought only about his immediate needs, and gave not even a glance at the future.

The future is now, at his father's bedside, and, in agony, he learns it is already gone.

So he lifted up his voice and cried, "Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!" And he wept.

Isaac has only one blessing that comes with a birthright, but he finds a word with just enough power to launch Esau into a future, not the one he imagined since he was a child and the older son, but one that will work for him in these sad new circumstances.

Here is Isaac's blessing for Esau:

See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be,
And away from the dew of heaven on high.
By your sword you shall live,
And you shall serve your brother,
But when you break free,
You shall break his yoke from your neck.

In other words, Esau must leave home, go far away, if he is to be free from his brother's rule. After receiving this secondary blessing, the story says: "Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching. Then I will kill my brother Jacob."

Word of his plans got to Rebekah, the mother in this story who always seems to be lurking around to hear the latest. So she sends Jacob to live with his uncle Laban until Esau forgets, like that's going to happen. And not long after, her husband Isaac dies and her other son Esau leaves, and there she is.

This story is so sad. So sad, it is almost impossible to see how God is at work here. The story is not over, though, and next week's episode will tell us more.

Still, it does seem that God is fulfilling God's promise to Abraham despite the short-sightedness of the human's God is relying on to fulfill that promise, the one where all the world is blessed, the one where all the world receives the gift of God's presence and care and . . . well, that's a blessing for next week.

Amen.

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