

Sermon – 11/15/20

Text – Genesis 27:41a; Genesis 28:5

Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him....Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

Theme – “Jacob’s Family”

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

For the next couple of Sundays — and for Thanksgiving — we will be looking at the patriarch, Jacob. Today’s sermon is entitled “Jacob’s Family”. So, what do we know about Jacob and his family? Well, let’s start with who Jacob was: he was the second son of Isaac, his elder brother being Esau. You may remember the story: Isaac and his wife Rebekah had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Though they were twins, Esau had been born first and so had the right of inheritance. Now, that meant not just a double share of all of Isaac’s earthly wealth (and there was a lot of that!), but also the inheritance of God’s promise to send the Savior through that line. All their lives, Jacob and Esau were in competition. Father Isaac preferred Esau; Mother Rebekah preferred Jacob. But the only vote that really counted – God’s – was for Jacob.

As Isaac got older, his eyesight got weaker and weaker, until he was finally blind. As he sensed death getting closer, he wanted to give the formal blessing to his favorite son — to Esau — the blessing which would officially convey the inheritance to him. So, Isaac sent Esau out to hunt some wild game for the feast which would accompany the rite. But while Esau was out hunting, Rebekah prompted Jacob to trick his father. She had him kill and prepare a goat as if it were some wild animal, then took the hide and bound it on Jacob’s arms (for Esau was a hairy man, and she knew Isaac would touch his arms to make sure it was Esau who came to him). It worked — Isaac was fooled. Jacob got the blessing and the birthright. And there was nothing that could be done to reverse it when Esau returned. Jacob had the blessing and God’s promise.

But that was not all he received. No, Jacob also had Esau's undying hatred, for Esau promised that he would kill his brother for his trickery and treachery. Now, even though God had said that the birthright would go to Jacob, what Jacob had done was wrong. He had not trusted in God to give him the birthright, but he had taken matters into his own hands and forced the issue. He stole it before God could give it to him.

As always, there is consequence for sin. In this case, it was the very real threat against Jacob's life. Jacob knew that Esau was only waiting for their father Isaac to die, so that he could then take his revenge. So again, Jacob takes matters into his own hands – at his mother's suggestion he flees the country, leaving his poor, aged father and his scheming, conniving mother behind. He fled to his mother's homeland, to her family, to her brother Laban.

When he reached Laban's home, Jacob made a deal with Uncle Laban to work for him seven years without wages, except that at the end of that time, Jacob would then marry Laban's beautiful daughter, Rachel. However, Laban proved to be just as tricky and slippery as Jacob: Laban substituted his other (and older, less-attractive, maybe even ugly) daughter — Leah — for Rachel on the wedding day. Of course, with the veils the bride wore at weddings in those days, Jacob could not see he had been deceived until it was too late. He had married the wrong woman! Now what was he to do? After confronting his uncle Laban over his deceit, Jacob agrees to Laban's offer of Rachel's hand in exchange for another seven years of work.

Now, that might sound like a workable compromise, but just look at what happens. Jacob has **two** wives, and of course they become jealous of each other (just as Jacob and Esau had been jealous of one another). Each of them plots and schemes to be Jacob's favorite: Rachel relying on the love she knows Jacob has for her, and Leah using the children God gives to her but withholds from Rachel. You can imagine the scene: Rachel flaunting Jacob's feelings for her to her sister; Leah taunting Rachel for being unable to bear children. And poor Jacob caught in the middle! What goes around, comes around as they say – Jacob is getting a taste of what he and Esau had put their father Isaac through, all those years.

The rivalry between the sisters got so bad that each of them brought other women – their own servants – to Jacob to marry so that they could count any children those women bore to Jacob as their own! Back and forth it went, year after year. And, to make matters even worse for Jacob, Laban continued his tricks to cheat Jacob out of the flocks and wages promised to Jacob as payment for his continued service.

Yet through it all, God is steadfast and true to His promises. Jacob is safe from Esau. He is provided a home and family with Laban, despite all its headaches and hassles. He even becomes rich in flocks and herds and servants, as God miraculously increases them at Laban's expense. But above all, God is there with His forgiveness for Jacob.

And though it all Jacob grows spiritually. He is not the same man that he was in his father Isaac's house. No, now instead of relying on his own wits and schemes, Jacob learns to trust in God and His promises. (pause)

So, now we need to look at how this lesson can be applied to us and our lives. Let's start with the Law aspects of the lesson – those things which show us our sin and accuse us — approaching the lesson from the framework of the Ten Commandments.

Jacob begins by wanting the birthright, which by custom really belonged to his brother Esau. That is coveting; a violation of the ninth and tenth commandments. It leads him to getting the birthright by treachery and deceit, breaking the seventh commandment. In the process Jacob disobeys his father, lies to him, deceives him, dishonors him – trampling the fourth commandment along the way. Even though God had told Rebekah that Jacob was to be the one who would receive the blessing, neither she nor Jacob waits for God to act but they take the matter into their own hands, betraying a lack of love and trust in God. And so down goes the first commandment. Does Jacob call on God to give him the birthright? No, and so he sins against the second commandment and its injunction to bring our needs and petitions to God. Jacob, after going to Laban, marries wife after wife and he does not hesitate to show favoritism between them and their children; in all *that* the sixth commandment takes quite a beating.

So, how have we been like Jacob? Well, have we been jealous of what belonged to another? Have we schemed and plotted how to get something? Have we failed to trust in God to provide, and instead taken matters into our own hands? Have we stolen, or gotten something by false ware or dealing? Have we been deceitful, dishonest, and lying? Have we fled our problems and sins, instead of facing them, admitting them, repenting of them, making amends (as best we can) for them? Have we failed to give proper respect and love to our parents, our spouses, our children?

Of course we have. You and I are sinners too. We are no more perfect and holy than was Jacob. There is wickedness, deceit, treachery, scheming, disrespect, disobedience, lust, adultery, favoritism, and a lack of trust in God in our families too – and in each of us personally. You know it, and I know it. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not loved God above all things. We have thought, said, and done things we should not have. And we have failed to do the things we should have. When we look at Jacob, we see ourselves. Maybe in bolder and more vivid colors, but the reflection is clear.

And just as Jacob deserved to suffer for his sins – just as he deserved to have his father angry with him, his brother angry with him, his wives and children angry with him, God angry at him – so do we. Our sins also cry out for vengeance and retribution. Our sins also have a price to be paid. (pause)

But now we come to the good stuff, to the Gospel. Now we leave what *Jacob* did and move on to what *God* did. Let's go back to that birthright that Jacob wanted so badly. As was said earlier, it involved the inheritance of the bulk of Isaac's earthly possessions, but much more important was that promise of a Savior. The promise that God had made back in Eden, when Adam had sinned: that One would come to crush the head of the Serpent and thus restore fallen mankind. Did God have to give that promise? Did Adam deserve it? Did his descendants, like deceitful Jacob or sinful you and me? Of course not. But that is who God is: the gracious One. The loving One. The forgiving One. And so, God promised to come Himself into our flesh and blood, into our sinful world, to fight our enemy for us and to defeat him.

Of course, Jesus is that promised Savior. He is God in the flesh, the Son of God and Son of Mary. He has taken our place: putting Himself under the Law and commandments, keeping and obeying them all for us. He has taken our place in suffering hell for those sins of Adam, of Jacob, of you and me. On the cross that price was fully and forever paid. Sin has been overcome. Satan has been deprived of any accusations against us. Death has been robbed of its sting and hold. You can see why Jacob was so desirous of having that birthright, of having what God had promised to give in and through that Savior.

That promise — that gift — of forgiveness and salvation are not just for the one who got the birthright of Isaac, though. Esau's sins were also carried by Christ, as were yours and mine. The victory of the cross is ours, no less than it is Jacob's. And all by faith, all by mere trust in the word of promise and life. Perhaps Jacob did not know that at first, but he came to learn it.

He learned it as he fled from the wrath of his brother, from the hell he had made by his sins. And yet, wherever he went there was God. God **for** him, to protect and save him. As Jacob went to live in exile with Laban, he learned to trust God. Jacob could not save himself from Esau, let alone from Satan. But as he struggled, as he had everything taken away from him (home, family, goods, even the inheritance for which he had so hungered) Jacob learned that when he had God, he truly had everything. God is his Father. God is his Provider. God is his home. Just as He is for us. So, does it really matter if we drive an old, beat-up car? Does it really matter if we work in some dead-end job with no future? Does it really matter if we have only a few friends? Does it really matter if we have health problems? Not if we have Christ. For if we have him, we have it all: forgiveness, peace, heaven, eternal life. (pause)

And the last thing for us to examine this morning is how God never gives up on Jacob. What a comfort that is to us, for we too often turn our backs on God. We too often fail to wait for the Lord. We too put our wants ahead of God and His Word. But God does not give up on us. Though we certainly do sin much — even daily — God still calls us back to Himself. That's why Luther advises us to **daily** remember our baptism and

what God has done for us there. Of how He has placed His name upon, making us His own dear children. Of how He has joined us to Christ and His resurrection – as the old sinful nature is daily killed through repentance and application of the Gospel.

That's why God directs — even commands — us to study His Word diligently and daily. Because in that Word we hear the Law and its killing accusations of sin, which drive us back to God's grace in Christ Jesus. Each week we come here, to this place, to confess our sins and to receive that absolution, that application of forgiveness and life. And that is why we hunger and thirst for the Lord's Supper, where we are fed with the very Body and Blood of Christ which have won our forgiveness and life. How precious a gift it is, to receive in our own hands, our own mouths, that which gives us heaven! (pause)

Today we heard about Jacob we see how God calls sinners to Himself. Not perfect people, but sinners. Sinners like you and me. But in Christ, we poor sinners have been made saints, simply by trust in His life/death/resurrection for us. For that, we thank and praise God, who has had mercy on us in our Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep you hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

OS: Nicene Creed

FE: Offertory/Prayers