

Despised his birthright. A sermon preached on July 24, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC, by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Scripture: GENESIS 25:19-34
I CORINTHIANS 1:26-29

Jacob, Esau, Rebekah, Isaac, Laban—players and people in the drama surrounding the Biblical 'first family'.

Their stories,
like all the stories of the first book of the Bible are
ever so real

Nothing is covered up or ignored in these first family stories—these are the Biblical equivalent of the too prevalent shows like *Sister Wives*, *Honey Boo Boo*, *Housewives of Atlanta*, *New York and I* am told this fall Toronto.

This is the material of tabloid front covers of those magazines many of us look at in supermarkets as we are waiting line,
but none of us would ever think of buying said tabloids would we?

There is though one important difference between TV reality shows and tabloids—these stories are in the Bible

And therefore,
these are stories of faith to be told and retold
Examined and re-examined,

Pondered and repondered upon

Before we again examine the first in this summer series on Jacob—the Trickster
Some introductory comments
Jacob's story is a bewildering tale—
It will infuriate that part within us that desperately wants good things to happen only to good people.

The methods and actions by which Jacob secures God's blessings are repulsive and weasley
Yet,
GOD BLESSES HIM AND GIVES HIM THE NAME THAT WILL FOREVER BE ASSOCIATED WITH PEOPLE OF GOD: Israel. Hmmm!

The story of Jacob is also an important reminder that God never gives up on us
We who live in the light of the Resurrection of Jesus know this—we are reminded and challenged to live by it all the time.

But, again, hear God's word to his people through the life of Jacob *God never gives up on any of us*

As the story begins in Genesis 25,
We see that Jacob has a long way to go and a lot to earn—and as the story unfolds we have to wonder whether he will ever learn that deceit and trickery are NOT the way to do things...

In the end, Jacob does come to value the right things—God and his blessings.
But the lessons learned are hard, difficult lessons

This is no “and they lived happily ever after story”
 For the Jacob story is followed by whose story?
 Right, the story of Joseph and his brothers!!!!

Final introductory comment

-the story of Jacob, like so many in the scriptures is one of exile and return.

And does not this resonate in our lives?

For many of us may begin our lives learning about the love, grace and mercy of God,

But then we grow cool and indifferent to the ways of God – peer pressure, life experience, can make us drift from God,

Our beomes a world view where God is just not part of the picture.

Then circumstances – perhaps as dramatic as Jacob’s as he wrestles through the night on the banks of the Jabbok with the “angel”) and we will look in some detail at that incident in a coming week,

We come to see a greater thing at work

Finding much to our surprise that what we expected to happen, did not
 That God (who we may not have thought about for years), that his mercy, grace and forgiveness – has always been there

And is there in our worst moments
 In such moments we are not shunned, but welcomed.

I was baptized and confirmed in the church,

But owing to a host of things, after confirmation did not much attend church, except when I was home from university and often then under duress.

Didn’t read the Bible, didn’t pray....

Saw my home church to be only a clergy killer church – not paying attention to the grace filled people who made up the bulk of the congregation and far outweighed the difficult people and well-intentioned dragons.

Church and the Christian faith was just not part of my world view,

Until the tragic death of a childhood best friend and his mother – in early 1972.

And I found myself asking a lot of why questions because the best friend was the son of my home minister who had then moved from Welland.

As our former home church minister lay in a coma for a number of days, I began again to faultingly pray for his recovery.

He did recover and after a number of years out of parish work, entered again into parish work, though never again full time.

He died a few years ago..well loved, and holding to his trust and obedience in the Lord Jesus.

Wow I thought – maybe there is really something to this being faithful to God.

I had no Pauline conversion and saw no burning bush.

In fact, this is not the work that I expected to be doing even when I began theological training.

But here I am..in the Lord's strength and by his grace, doing what I do and have done now for nearly 36 years.

Proving once the truth of St. Paul's counsel that Kate read earlier from I Corinthians.

When I began my ministry in Guelph as the assistant to a large congregation, my mother said to me, and she re-iterated it more than once – that this was not the direction she saw my life taking

-I would never have any friends

-I would never have any money

-I would never live in a nice house.

Well Mom, two out of three isn't bad....

And so we begin with the account of the trickery around the birthright.

An object of trickery for one brother,

A precious thing too easily surrendered by the other.

The narrator in Genesis wastes no time in describing the scene.

What we have is straight-forward underhandedness by Jacob,

And straight-forward inability to control desires by Esau

Who is I wonder the bigger jerk.

Esau or Jacob.

I wonder, what kind of brother engages in this level of deceit with his only sibling.

I wonder what kind of fool is so hungry that he agrees to such a ridiculous proposition.

What is this "birthright"?

According to Biblical law,

Upon the father's death, the oldest son inherited a double portion of the father's estate.

In essence, Esau got 2/3'rds to Jacob's 1/3rd of Isaac's eventual estate

One would have to be either beyond famished or awfully obtuse to give up half of a potential inheritance for a bowl of lentil stew (pottage) -the red stuff

Esau's words convey so much in terms of mood do they not?

Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished (Gen. 25:30)

I cannot hear those words without picturing some loaf coming to a table and saying "GIMME!!!!

First sell me your birthright.

I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?

Say what?

So, what does this story say to us?

It is a story that reminds us in terms of human relationships in and outside of families, this is a very complex world in which God works his purposes.

This is no simple A=B world

This is a 'ball of string' world with many ends sticking out and one is always uncertain as to which one to pull to unravel the ball properly.

This is a story that causes questions to be asked.

I wonder how the promise of God can be worked out in such situations with such people – this is the Biblical first family for goodness sake.

As Jacob's story unfolds,

We see the plans and purposes of God tied up and entangled in a web of self-interest and self-seeking.

I believe this is where the story begins to work on us, its current readers.

Jacob's story reminds us that *the Bible does not shy away or cover up real life.*

These are not one dimensional character in one dimensional setting – sort of like Biblical cut out paper dollies

Their world is not always orderly, neat and tidy.

It's messy – REALLY MESSY

Whether that mess is a result of unresolved generational hurts,

Bibling rivalry

Parental favoritism

Duplicity

Greed – the end result is often a mess

Touch point for us – *this side of heaven, untidiness and complexity in relationships with God, with others and within ourselves is part of the human condition.*

The unalterable truth that "this is my Father's world" – I have no question
But it is a very complex world in which we live and are called to trust and obey God.

In this story, we also see the destructiveness of an inability to delay self-gratification.

Esau cannot see beyond the immediate.

He cannot control his desires

The language of the text is brutish.

He is not really starving – he just says and acts as if he is.

He cannot even recall the proper name of the stew Jacob is cooking – "red stuff" he calls it!!

Those who can manage Hebrew say that the verb "to eat" in verse 30, is the same verb used to refer to an animal's eating.

The picture you get of Esau then is a person who only wants to stuff his face.

If Hollywood were remaking this, who might they choose to play Esau – one of the dufus's from the Animal House or Porky's franchise of movie someone coarse. someone who calls everyone else 'Dude' or 'bro'....

What about Jacob – Jack Nicolson?

Picture the scene – birthright – sure-here – take it (vs. 32)

Just give me that red stuff!!!

No twinge of conscience about the enormity of the action.

A picture of a person who despises the best God can give – in this case – the birthright.

The ability to delay self-gratification remains a mark of naturity

For it means that one is taking into consideration the wider picture and the longer view, it means that one is assessing that there are real consequences to action and inaction it means that immediate satisfaction is not seen to be as valuable as delaying, learning to wait with purpose and intent.

Delay of self-gratification is rarely easy, for we live in an instant results world that believes there are no consequences to actions and if there are consequences, well...who cares.

A world that chants over and over again – you deserve it, you owe it to yourself!!! –whatever it is!!!!

A world that has serious issues with waiting, with simplicity, with full enjoyment of God's creation – which includes stewardship of the resources of God's world.

It is a 'just give me the red stuff Jacob' world.

This is also a story in which we are confronted by the mysterious workings of God.

The oracle of verse 23 is fulfilled

**“Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the elder shall serve the younger.”**

God challenges the conventions of the community in not choosing the first born.

We are not told why – God just does!

And here in this story, birthright and blessing (next week's story) does not mean ease.

In fact,

Trouble and conflict mark most of Jacob's life.

This is the way it is for the one chosen of God – with no comment by God offered.

The whole Jacob story raises questions about God that we cannot ignore

They are not easy questions, for they involve 'whys |

And in scripture and in life, God does not answer why questions – not this side of heaven.

I wonder, does this mean God does not care.

I wonder does this mean God is distant and removed from our daily lives

I wonder, does this mean that God's love and presence is random and chance

No most certainly not. ---For to read carefully and reflect on the Jacob story and the points in which it intersects our lives,

We see clearly that God is very much involved.

Very much present and near – as Jacob moves from rickster to spiritually aware of the presence of God in his life

For Jacob moves from independence,--what's in it for me

To dependence – it is all in God's hands.

There is mystery and wonder here in Jacob's life
and spiritual journey – as there is in our own
spiritual journey

God has the power to make promises and keep
them, in spite of worldly rules and conventions and
even human expectations

Unnerving and upsetting – yes, it can be and is
But the mysterious working of God is a GIVEN

With this and so many other wondrous and
mysterious things we as God's people today – you
and I

Like Jacob long ago must “wrestle”

The narrator of this story leaves us no
alternative.

AMEN