

What does it mean to be “Blessed” to be “Chosen?” The First Letter of Peter describes the Church as “A Royal Priesthood, the Bride of Christ, a Holy Nation, The People belonging to God.”

Does this guarantee that whatever we do is GOOD, Blessed and will be fulfilled? That we can do no wrong, or be protected from failure? The shift in Genesis from stories about Adam, Noah and Babel, to Abraham and his descendants represents a new revelation, instead of GOD appealing to all the World, that GOD chose one person/family (later Jesus Nazareth) through whom to Call the world to follow GOD. Slavery to Pharaoh, Diaspora by Assyria, Exile in Babylon, and the Holocaust of the 20th Century each demonstrated that being “CHOSEN” may require being a symbol of persecution and oppression rather than of prosperity. As demonstrated the last several weeks, the covenant relationship of GOD with Abraham and Isaac was difficult enough; however, the stories of Jacob represent Israel in its earthiest and most scandalous.

Somehow American Culture has whitewashed all Christianity, all the Church, all People of God as being Homogenous, as Morally and Ethically Pure and as Happy as the Walmart Smiley Face. As a 2nd generation Pastor, I have known that as the Body of Christ we are not all the same, not always happy, and often times, in the name of religion this Royal Priesthood have been brutal to one another.

Last week, we left Isaac, “Fulfillment of the Promise to Abraham,” with his new wife Rebekah, who was not Canaanite but a partner chosen from Abraham’s own Nation and People and Family, sister of the Trickster Laban. Painfully, biology does not always happen when and how we desire. Like many couples, for years they were unable to conceive. There are all kinds of reasons for this, but month after month, the couple experienced loss and shame, the stress placed on their marriage because they were unable to do something as seemingly natural as having a baby. The same circumstance had troubled Abraham and Sarah, but this time, Isaac prayed to GOD for his wife. Without explanation, they become pregnant, not just with a baby but with twins. This is Genesis, the new Beginning for us, today.

Throughout time people have laid blame for the Palestinian/Israeli conflict on Esau and on Jacob. The birth story that the second delivered of the twins, was holding the heel of Esau, gave rise to his being named Jacob, meaning Heel-Grabber, struggling to get ahead of everyone else.

As an ancient campfire story of where the fighting between Israel and Palestine, between Jews and Arabs, came from: the Israelites ridiculing Esau and his Arab descendants as big, dumb, hairy animal-like brutes, concerned only with the immediate gratification of hunting, killing and feeding his stomach.

The underlying truth is that “conflict happens,” everyone is not always going to agree on everything. The question is whether we can respect one another so much that when life happens we can support one another rather than shaming them as incompetent and blaming the other for all the problems of the world. That said, there is responsibility in this story for everyone to own the conflict. Before the twins were born, while tearing Rebekah apart in the womb, GOD reveals that there are two Nations already fighting inside her. In the conception of these two, GOD has upset the natural order of the world. Human cultures through the present have treated the first-born as different from their siblings. Among royalty this is the Law of Primogeniture, meaning that the first-born inherits at least twice as much as others, if not inheriting everything! In our family growing up, while the parents tried to treat us equally, the elder two were referred to as “The Big Guys, or the Older ones”, where the later children were “the Little Guys or the Younger ones.” GOD reveals to Rebekah that as described in the Letter to the Corinthians:

“GOD chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, GOD chose the weak to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised, even things that do not matter to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of GOD.”

In an earthy way, this is “Justification by Grace.” Jacob replaces Esau for no other reason than GOD willed.

Whether she ever revealed this truth to her husband Isaac, Rebekah and Isaac each play favorites among their children. Having grown up a Nomad, the son of a Tribal Chief, who himself becomes the leader of a powerful Nation, Isaac prefers Esau, who is an outdoorsman, a successful hunter. Jacob appears more bookish, refined, he enjoys spending time at home helping his mother and the women with cooking. Is it any wonder this family were headed for trouble?

According to one story, after hunting for days, Esau returned home from hunting in the wild, starving. Meanwhile, Jacob had been cooking an aromatic red beans, rice, lentils and cabbage. Can't you just smell the Garlic and Onions? Feeling weak from hunger, tempted by Jacob's culinary skills, Esau demands what Jacob has. Jacob agrees to give it to Esau, only if Esau signs over his birthright as firstborn. They were TWINS, what does it matter which was born first? While this may seem only words spoken between brothers over a meal, throughout FAITH, Spoken WORDS sealed by the eating of a meal are the basis of PASSOVER and the Sacrament of COMMUNION. Because of this circumstance, Esau is perceived as short-sighted, only concerned with hunting and gathering; Jacob as Intentional, calculating, planting an idea of his rights for the future.

There is this revelation of GOD to Rebekah before their birth;
there is the selling of the BIRTHRIGHT for a meal between the brothers;
what stands in the way of fulfillment, is ISAAC.

Of course it is Isaac, Isaac is FULFILLMENT of GOD'S COVENANT BLESSING given to Abraham; Isaac is the Chief of the Family Tribe in a Patriarchal culture; and ISAAC's favorite is Esau not Jacob.

ISAAC sends Esau out hunting, in order to give his favorite Son, the firstborn His Blessing, but Rebekah intervenes, instructing Jacob that she will make his father's favorite meal the way he likes it, for Jacob to receive Isaac's blessing, and for JACOB to wear a fur coat to imitate ESAU's HAIRY ARMS.

The importance of CONFERRING A BLESSING is hard for us to overstate, and harder for us to understand. In some ways, BLESSING is SYMBOLIC, by these words and relationship, we become more than we were. Ours is a world of PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT, HS and COLLEGE Degrees, JOB Promotions, Awards and recognitions for individual achievement. GENESIS is a world where FAMILY is identity in the world. Many of us have done Family Genealogy in order to discern who we are connected to, where we came from. CONFERRING BLESSING is passing of responsibility, place in the world, and power, from one generation to the next. This Litigious society of sound-bytes argues over and disputes nuance and meaning of words. When we think of BLESSING, remember the power of SACRAMENTAL WORDS, "By the power committed unto me as a Minister of Jesus Christ and the Laws of this State, I Declare that so and so are husband and wife..." "I Baptize you in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit..." "This is my body broken for you... This is the Cup of your Salvation sealed in my own blood, drink ye all of it." "Who is your LORD and SAVIOR?" "JESUS CHRIST is my Lord and my Savior." HOWEVER, this BLESSING from ISAAC to the next Generation is gotten by DECEPTION. This story exemplifies that GENESIS is not a spiritual treatise on ethics and morality, so much as a MEMORY OF HOW FAITH MOVES in the RAWNESS of experience and relationships. In the end, this conferring of BLESSING is not about Jacob or Esau, not about Isaac or Rebekah. The BLESSING reveals and confers GOD's BLESSING.

The BLESSING given JACOB is even more extravagant than ABRAHAM received and conferred to Isaac: "May GOD bless you of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, the 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 anyone who curses you and blessed be everyone who blesses you." Bought with deceit the BLESSING left for ESAU is: "Your dwelling will be away from earth's richness, away

from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from your neck.”

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