November 11, 2018
Lesson 11: Jacob Receives Isaac’s Blessing
Scripture: Gen. 27: 5-10, 18-19, 21-29

Context:

Last week we met two twins, Jacob and Esau. The two were as different as could be with varying interests and even different physical attributes. They do their own thing and even battle with each other as our story reminds us in their exchange over the birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew. The perfect storm is created.

Our chapter opens up with Isaac on his deathbed. As Isaac gives Esau instructions for how he is to be blessed as the patriarch of the next generation, he asks that Esau once again go and hunt before he receives his blessing. In the course of their conversation, Rebekah listens to what will happen. She takes the opportunity to plan her own blessing. She asks for Jacob to do just as she asks so that he will receive the blessing instead of his brother. Jacob agrees to go along with the plan.

So Jacob puts on his brother’s clothes, gives up two of his goats to be the food, and then covers himself with fur so that he can be as hairy as Esau. When he approaches Isaac, his father is not easily fooled. He can hear that this is not Esau, but his other son. Yet with failing eyesight it may be hard to see. So he touches Jacob and feels that the fur must indeed be the hair that covers his eldest. When asked for confirmation, Jacob lies and says that he is indeed Esau.

They then proceed to the blessing where Jacob brings him the food to eat and then wine is brought forward to wash down the food and dull Isaac’s senses. Isaac invites him forward to receive a kiss and in doing so, Isaac can smell his oldest son. It is the distinct smell of sweat, the outdoors, and perhaps even of animal. This is Esau, the oldest son, the hunter and the one who will be the next patriarch.

So Isaac blesses Jacob. He asks specific blessings to fall upon him and that he be the one that has nations bow down to serve him. Perhaps the most condemning and ironic part of the blessing is that he will be the most powerful brother of all and that all relatives bow down to him. Those who curse him will be cursed and those who bless him will be blessed.

Jacob has stolen his brother’s blessing. He has been given the words and affirmation that his brother would have received. In the process, a whole family falls apart with distrust and betrayal. Yet in the midst of it, Jacob is the one who is blessed. Regardless of our feelings about the characters and their roles in the narrative, the narrative shows that God is strangely at work for Jacob without regard to what we think about him or his mother.1 Jacob is the one God makes father of Israel and is the one who continues the covenant made with Abraham.

Application

This story comes perfectly as the holiday season approaches. While we certainly prepare for Advent and the coming of the Christ child, we also know that family drama

sometimes comes to a head in this season. Issues that have been brewing for years come
to a boiling point and moments such as we read in the text show that we are not the only
people with dysfunctional families. The same goes for the ancient world as well.

The easy approach in this text would try to focus upon the family dynamics and
who should rack up the highest with the blame game. However, I think that misses the
point of the text. We know that what Jacob did was sneaky. He pretended to be his
brother. He lied to his father and said that he was his brother directly to his dying father.
He took something that belonged to his brother.

Yet God is strangely an advocate for Jacob. He receives the blessing and he is the
one who does become the patriarch of his family, giving birth to the twelve tribes of
Israel. Even though he does something that we consider deceitful and wrong, he becomes
the chosen one of God.

I think we can all learn from Jacob because we all have done something wrong in
our lives where we have sinned. Perhaps we lied about something in a relationship to
avoid conflict or even use someone. Maybe we lied at work to get ahead or show the boss
who is really in charge. We may have deceived a “friend” so we can get something out of
them that solely benefits us.

As perfect as some of us may strive to be, we all slip into behaviors that are not
the healthiest and end up hurting ourselves and others in the long run. Even the most
pious people can do the most heinous things in certain circumstances. All you have to do
is open the history book of any group of people and see that people sometimes did
something to get ahead.

Some pre-Civil War southern preachers said slavery was ordained by God
according to the books of Philemon and Galatians to keep their status and to appease their
wealthier congregants. When it came to women’s ordination in various denominations,
temper flared. Some Christian male clergy and laity said that women cannot lead as
senior pastors from the words in First Timothy and the letter to the Corinthians. While
they may have cried it’s about biblical authority, the actual truth is that they desired
control and saw the threat of women who may be as gifted or even more prepared for
ministry than them. That struggle continues even today.

Those individuals were all Christians and did good things for the kingdom. Yet
they had their growing edges. We can add to that list the number of things we do that do
not highlight our best selves.

Yet the Lord continues to love us and give us grace that we do not deserve. Even
though we may make a mess of the world around us, God still uses us in some way to do
good work for the kingdom. That is something I try to remember for myself and for those
around me. We are all sinners and we all struggle from time to time, day to day. Yet God
is still at work in us and continues to use us with our growing edges. How do you
experience God blessing you? What growing edges do you have like Jacob? Where have
you felt God used you even though you did something wrong? Where do you see God at
work in others with their growing edges? These are the kinds of questions that the story
of Jacob gives us as we are reminded that even in all the messes we create, the Lord is
still at work in our lives.

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