

Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

My two sons, Benjamin and Evan, were both born by Caesarian. Marianne had what is called a cerclage, which is kind of like a big suture that was around her cervix to help strengthen her cervix, but because that was around her cervix, that meant that she couldn't deliver the children naturally so they had to come out by caesarian. Now, the great thing about a planned caesarian is that you know when your child is to be born. The down side is, when you have a son like my oldest son, Benjamin, who decides he wants to come a day early, that means that when mom is in Lewisburg at her parents' house (she was planning on giving birth in Lewisburg), but she was in Lewisburg and I was in Gettysburg, and if you happen to know anything Pennsylvania geography, you can't get there from here. Benjamin decided that, being impatient as always, he wanted to come a day early. A fun thing about coming early, though, is that at least he was able to be born not only in the same **hospital** that his mother was born in; and not only that, he also had my mother-in-law (his **grandmother**), my wife's mother, present both at her birth, (there's a surprise) and his birth because it was kind of neat because she was able to be there with him; he was also born at the same **time** as his mother, 8:04 AM. Had he waited a day, like he was suppose to, not only could I have been there, but he would have been born in the afternoon (that's way too much information for you, I know, but I thought I would share anyway).

So now, my younger son, Evan, was born on a June afternoon and for his birth I was able to be there. I will say that's probably the first operation I've ever really watched. But, it was so amazing to watch little Evan come out of his mom all wet and bloody and scrawny and really rather a little bit upset about leaving mom's womb. But as soon as the attending staff got him all cleaned up - you know they run their quick test, ten fingers: check; ten toes: check; two eyes: okay, everything looks good - They wrapped him in a blanket and handed him to me. And I just held him here in the crook of my arm. These six pound newborns, they can fit right there. He was scrawny and all red like a lobster, but I continue to marvel that how this *being* that I could hold with one arm, from my elbow to my wrist, is now this twelve year old skateboarding seventh grader.

In all the times that Marianne was pregnant, none of the pregnancies were necessarily all that difficult for her. There was no fighting in the womb, although Evan was a little more rambunctious than his older brother. But, thinking back on the birth of my children, I can see a fair number of similarities between or there in our lesson tonight from Genesis.

So last week we heard the story about Isaac and Rebekah getting married: Sarah, Isaac's mom, had died, and Abraham, Isaac's dad, was concerned about getting a wife for his son. He didn't want him marrying any of those local Canaanite women. So Abraham gets his trusted servant and he sends him off back to the old homestead to get a wife for Isaac. Now Abraham specifically sends the servant back to the homeland because he wants him to find a wife from a certain group of people. The Lord God intervenes and the servant is able to find this young woman Rebekah, whose brother is Laban, and she is the daughter of Bethuel, (which means "House of EL", or "House of the Lord".) Bethuel who was born to Milcah, who is the wife of

Nahor, who happens to be Abraham's brother. So Rebekah is daughter of Nahor, now before we start going '*oh yuck, he's marrying his first cousin,*' we have to remember from Abraham's point of view, Isaac is marrying *within* the clan, and NOT one of those Canaanite women, because they don't worship the Lord God; they worship Ba'al. They're ritually unclean, and it is important to Abraham that his son marry a ritually clean woman.

(Now in a little bit of a tangent story, Isaac's not the only who is getting married, Abraham takes a new wife as well. Her name is Keturah, and with Keturah he pops out six more kids. But that's an aside, it's really a fun little story, but you have to go to chapter 24 in Genesis and read it. You all have Bibles, go home and read it.) Forty year old Isaac gets married, (remember Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah to whom the covenant was given, the first covenant: 'I will be your God, you will be my people. Your descendants shall outnumber the stars in the sky.') Okay, Abraham and Sarah have Isaac . . . outnumber the stars in the sky? **One** does not seem to outnumber the stars in the sky. Isaac gets married to Rebekah. She takes after her mother-in-law; she's **not** poppin' out kids very quickly; so Isaac prays to God; God blesses them; Rebekah gets pregnant. But it's not really a good pregnancy for her. It seems like from Day One these two kids inside of her are kicking each other, arguing about whose going to get the better seat in the womb, and on the way out, as the one brother's coming out the other reaches up and grabs hold of his brother's heel.

Now, Esau, (Esau means hairy, okay) comes out like my Evan, he's all red, he's hairy (a lot like my Evan), but he's an outdoors kind of a guy; he becomes dad's favorite. Meanwhile Jacob (which means 'he who grabs the heel', or 'he who usurps or overthrows'). Those were the footnotes that you didn't get in your reading. But that's what those names mean) is a quiet guy. He's the indoor kind. He likes to read, he likes to cook, and he's mom's favorite. Parents aren't supposed to have favorites, but they are favorites.

So the first story we get about Jacob and Esau is that one day Jacob is in the tent, back at camp, and he's cooking. He is apparently the Rachel Ray of the day. And so he is making a wonderful meal and Esau comes in from the field. He's been out hunting or doing something or whatever. He's not very successful. Nor is he a very good planner. He's not a Boy Scout. He didn't bring any water; he didn't bring any snacks for himself. He comes back to camp and he is "famished" he says and he smells immediately what his brother is cooking. The exchange that follows sounds like something that could have happened in the Brock household.

Esau: "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!"

Jacob: "First sell me your birthright."

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

Jacob: "Swear to me first."

Now, admittedly in the Brock household, it would be more along the lines of:

"I'm STARVING! Give me your peanut butter and jelly."

"You want my PBJ? Five bucks."

"I'm about to DIE and you want five bucks?"

"Give me five bucks!"

"Alright, fine, I'll give you five bucks.")

Now in this whole exchange there's more going on here than what I think our 21st Century North American years really understand. We understand the whole "**famished**" thing, although I really

think that is hyperbole. Esau may have been hungry; he may have been extremely hungry, but “famished?” “About to die”? I don’t think so.

Edom: they start to call him Edom. Edom is another word for “red.” He sees the red bowl of stew so ‘give me some of that red stuff’ he says. Remember, too, when he was born, he was a reddish color. So red seems to be a recurring theme in Esau’s life. And so that is why he gets the nickname of Red. The nickname of Edom. Edom is another one of the biblical kingdoms. This is Esau; Esau becomes one of the forbearers of the biblical kingdom of Edom. Remember what the prophecy to Rebekah was: the two children in your womb shall both be a great kingdom. So Esau, Edom, is going to become the kingdom of Edom.

Another thing going on, we get this whole thing about **birthright**. Now when we hear birthright you might tend to think of “inheritance” which is close to what birthright means, about the same way that ice cream is close to eggs. It’s not exactly the same thing. Birthright does mean that you’re inheriting something, but it’s more than that. It’s more than just inheriting the stuff from your parents. It’s also that you have responsibilities; you have responsibilities for all the people, all the servants that your parents had. You have responsibilities for you entire extended family and most importantly whoever has the birthright now becomes the patriarch of the clan. Now Jacob, that’s the birthright. That’s what Esau has just basically given away for a bowl of stew. Now Jacob, on the other hand, again from our 21st Century North American point of view, is often seen as being the sneaky, conniving one because I think we tend to equate him with Joe Isuzu. You know: ‘yeah, I’ll give you a bowl of soup, sure - just give me something, just give me your birthright, just give me your birthright, you don’t need your birthright.’ You know we tend to see JACOB as being unscrupulous, underhanded, as a cheater, but who is it that despises their birthright? What was the closing verse – and there thus, Esau “despised his birthright.”

Now, admittedly, the whole birthright issue *does* come down to Isaac, because Isaac’s still the patriarch until he dies, and he’s the one who is actually going to go and lay his hands on and give the blessing. (We don’t get that part of the story; you have to keep reading in the chapter to get to that part of the story. It’s not until later on when Isaac is dying that Rebekah conspires against her husband to get Jacob the blessing, and together Rebekah and Jacob work to get Jacob to receive the blessing and Esau does not get the hands on blessing of the birthright. But that’s in chapter 27, so you got to read ahead to get that story.)

The whole birthright issue is what this story comes down to: What it means to have a birthright; What good it is, or how does it play into our daily lives. I think that that’s in part what I tend to struggle with, because I tend to hear “birthright” and tend to equate it with is the word “privilege.” And I know that there are those that feel they are privileged simply by the virtue of their birth. I was just talking to someone today that teaches down in Baltimore at a private school and she was telling me how so many of the students at that school think that ‘well, my parents are wealthy, I go to this private school. Therefore, I am sixteen and I should automatically get a brand new car. I should automatically get this just because I am wealthy, just because I am privileged.’ That is what we tend to think of when we hear the word privilege but they have not done anything or earned what they are demanding or possibly even deserve what they are asking for.

To be given everything from a parent often at the expense of all others, when we think of it in that way, tends to rub against our American sense of fair play. But I think we need to think of

birthright in this way: each of us who are here, each of us who are baptized through the waters into Christ Jesus, each and every one of us who are baptized has a birthright. A birthright that we did NOT earn, a birthright that we have not DONE anything for, a birthright that we probably even don't deserve. And that birthright is, of course, that gift of Grace. That gift of God's love and forgiveness. We didn't earn any of that, nor can we ever earn God's love, and that's the broader implication that's going on in our story here. The story of two brothers sniping at each other. 'Oh, I'd never act the way Esau and Jacob do to each other.' Oh really? Have I lived my life beyond reproach? Has everything that I have ever done been for the glory of God?

Knowing this story, about Esau and Jacob, we do get the lesson that the end justifies the means. To which I must say, I usually don't agree with that type of transaction because when we look at the death of Christ on the cross, we realize that the means justifies the end. Because what Jesus did for us on the cross, I can never do for him or anybody. I CAN, however, strive to live a life that is reconciled to God, knowing that I am forgiven, knowing that I don't deserve that forgiveness, but still called to share the love and grace and forgiveness with all of those around me. The people I know and love, the people I know and really don't like very much at all, the people that I haven't even met yet. My birthright, the waters of my baptism, given to me from the cross call me to live that way.

I live in the hope that my children will one day learn how to be friends with each other. Some days they are more successful at that than others. Rebekah nor Isaac really didn't look for that for their two sons, but the Lord God Almighty, I believe, looks upon all of us who bear the mark of baptism upon our forehead. God knows all who partake in the bread and the wine, the body and the blood. God gives that birthright of Love, and Grace, and Forgiveness to all of us. No matter if we're red and hairy, or quiet and a good cook, or like to skateboard, or would rather play computer games. No matter who we are, or what we do, God gives that love and grace and forgiveness to each and every one of us and calls us to do the same for others.

Amen.