

Genesis 25:19-34

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Don't Make Me Come Back There!

This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, [20] and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.

[21] Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. [22] The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

[23] The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

[24] When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.

[25] The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau.

[26] After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

[27] The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents.

[28] Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

[29] Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished.

[30] He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)

[31] Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."

[32] "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

[33] But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

[34] Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

One of my fondest memories of childhood is traveling. We were indeed a traveling family so if you wonder why we take long family vacations to faraway destinations, it's because both Grace and I were raised that way.

The difference, however, is that Grace was an only child. I had three siblings. When we traveled, there was often sibling rivalry brought on by the boredom of long days in the back seat of a station wagon with vinyl seats. It's amazing how your bare legs stick to seats as the result of no air conditioning. And that phenomena results in orneriness.

Several responses occurred from the front seat when we began to fight. They usually occurred in a certain progression. When the fight began, it was, "You kids leave each other alone." (a simple warning). The next level of warning resulted from the annoyance of hearing the whining and "Mom, he crossed the line." Next was the, "Alright kids, Don't make me come back there because you are going to be sorry." This usually was not enough to stop us, so from that escalation, one of two things usually occurred. One option was that Dad would turn around and start smacking the nearest kid which would result in him swerving all over the road placing all our lives in peril. The second option was when Dad would pull over to the side of the road and say sternly, "OUT!"

That meant that we would have to run the next mile. Dad would look at his odometer and drive until it was exactly one mile and he would wait for us to run up to where the car was parked. If we decided to play stubborn and walk slowly, he would pull ahead another mile. The kids in our family had the distinct privilege of seeing Montana, Canada, Wisconsin and all parts in between both by car and on foot.

I was known as the smart mouth in the family. That meant that I usually had a sarcastic reply when the moment didn't really call for one. On one such occasion when my Dad's mood was heating up, he said, "Don't make me come back there." And I very wryly replied, "If you did, the car would run off the road and we'd all be killed." He didn't laugh.

Sibling rivalry. All families have it to some degree and in most cases it is simple child's play - as it was on our vacations. Yet sometimes it's serious. Families don't speak to each other for years because of a single incident resulting in a broken relationship. Family weddings and funerals are awkward occasions where everyone is walking on pins and needles in hopes of not resurrecting the drama of the past.

Our text today describes two twin boys who came into the world fighting. You heard me preach on these two just a few weeks ago. Jacob and Esau. I talked about Jacob's dream and the ladder going up to heaven and how the angels went up and down that ladder.

One brother (Esau) was called the "Hairy one" or "The Red One" and the other (Jacob) was called "Heel" or "Supplanter" because Jacob the second born was hanging onto his brother's heel at birth. They had jostled each other in the womb, and were now born with the second one competing with the oldest. Later when Esau, the eldest brother, came in from hunting and found that his brother had a big pot of chili (red stuff) hot and ready to eat, he willingly gave up his birthright for a bowl of the red stuff.

Here we have two men, neither one seemingly honest and full of integrity – vying for their parent’s favor: Particularly the birthright.

The birthright was their material inheritance. The first one gets twice what the second one gets. Esau was due to get twice as much as Jacob. We can wonder why God chose Jacob over Esau. But when we consider that the Covenant was at stake through the lineage of Abraham and his descendants would number as the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea – you see what is at stake. Esau was willing to give up his birthright for a bowl of chili! Would he not also give up the covenant if he felt like giving it up in a weak moment?

While Jacob used trickery to win his father’s favor and birthright, he at least showed a strong desire to have his father’s birthright – something Esau easily gave away. These two brothers never got along. Even after the birthright was stolen by Jacob, Esau pursued his brother to try and kill him. Welcome to the Dysfunctional family of the Old Testament. Cain killed Abel. Ham disgraced his father Noah. Abraham ran ahead of God to conceive a child with Hagar the house servant. Now Jacob tricked his brother Esau.

This was also a story that is a good example of the dysfunctional and destructive force in a family when a parent favors one child over another. Rebecca favored Jacob and Isaac favored Esau. Isaac was somewhat justified in his favoritism because by birth, Esau had earned the right by being the firstborn. Most of his father’s inheritance would go to him by nature of the birth order. But Rebecca favored Jacob and even conspired to fool her own husband into favoring Jacob with the birthright.

I want you to consider something. The Bible tells us that we are children of God. That makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. The church is a family. We are siblings who sometimes don’t get along together. We sometimes hurt one another with our words or our actions. We sometimes have awkward relationships where one personality grates against another personality. Clashes in vision and ideas create conflicting systems of allies and foes.

The apostle Paul talks about the kind of conflicts happening in the early church. The Corinthian church where they argued over who was most important and selfishly gorged themselves at their potluck dinners (Agape meals) while others went hungry who were at the end of the line.

Paul talked of Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2) who didn’t get along with each other. Even Peter and Paul had a difference of opinion on the issue of circumcision. The fact is, we aren’t all going to see eye to eye on everything. Yet just because we have a difference of opinion, it doesn’t mean we can’t get along. Just because we disagree doesn’t mean we have to be disagreeable.

Churches across the community celebrate Christ in different ways. But the bottom line is this: **WE ARE IN CHRIST.**

Differences begin to break down when we focus on the central figure. We might not always agree. We might fight about different things. Like the backseat of my Dad's station wagon, we cross the line and offend the other person from time to time. Yet at the end of the day, we are still brothers and sisters. We can be assured that in the midst of this imperfect family, there is love. With all our imperfections, we are brothers and sisters operating under the power of the Holy Spirit.

Those of us who have been here a while – with all our imperfection – we can welcome new people into the kingdom of God and demonstrate the love of Christ and the acceptance we can have for one another. Conflict is not unusual in the church. What matters is how we deal with it. Will it teach us the fruits of the spirit of love, patience and longsuffering or will we slip into divisiveness and broken relationships.

Like Jacob and Esau, fractured relationships can be brutal and long-lasting. But we encounter a change in chapter 33 of Genesis. They make peace with one another. They offer gifts of reconciliation and they embrace and they meet each other's families. Jacob says to Esau, **“What a relief to see your friendly smile, it is like seeing the face of God!”** (v. 10).

Whether it be in your family or in your church or in whatever kind of relationship, reconciliation can be a holy act of looking into the face of that former enemy and it is like looking into the face of God.

The beautiful thing is, Isaac died knowing that his sons were reconciled. That must have brought him such peace after all the years of family drama. It required one or both of the feuding siblings to set aside their differences and reach out to the other. In the end, there was peace and their families were reconciled.

God desires this kind of peace. Paul told Euodia and Syniche in Philippians 4:2 to “Be of the same mind in the Lord.” In other words, set aside the difference and let Christ be the important bond between you. That's good advice for us today, as well. Let Christ rule in our lives, so that the fruit of the spirit flows from us.