

“Jacob and Esau”

Genesis 25:19-34

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son:

Abraham was the father of Isaac,
and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah,
daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram,
sister of Laban the Aramean.

Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren;
and the LORD granted his prayer,
and his wife Rebekah conceived.

The children struggled together within her;
and she said, “If it is to be this way, why do I live?”

So she went to inquire of the LORD.

And the LORD said to her, “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.”

When her time to give birth was at hand,
there were twins in her womb.

The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle;
so they named him Esau.

Afterward his brother came out,
with his hand gripping Esau's heel;
so he was named Jacob.

Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter,
a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man,
living in tents.

Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game;
but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew,
Esau came in from the field, and he was famished.

Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff,
for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.)

Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."

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

Jacob said, "Swear to me first."

So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.
Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew,
and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way.
Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Jacob and Esau

Genesis 25:19-34

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I.

This morning's scripture reading from Genesis 25 begins the story of the sons of Rebecca and Isaac, twin brothers Jacob and Esau. As the grandsons of Abraham and Sarah, *one* of the two brothers was destined to be the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham and Sarah in which God promised land (Canaan), a multitude of descendants, and the blessings to be a great nation through which *all* the families of the world would be blessed. As to *which* brother would be the forbearer of such a nation, well, that became the question which this story was intended to answer.

Truth is, Jacob or Esau were as different as the day is long, with neither of them being particularly virtuous or endearing. As is the case throughout the Hebrew Scriptures this story exemplifies a willingness and, even, a propensity for God to utilize flawed human beings, sometimes deeply so, to bring about God's divine plan for our world.

II.

Esau, as the older twin, had the natural glide-path owing to his birth right. He was a skilled outdoorsman and hunter, which garnered favor from his father, but he was also fairly bestial, impulsive, and unrefined in both manner and mind. Esau made poor choices, acted impulsively, and was nowhere near the sharpest tool in the shed. Jacob was almost the total opposite. He was favored by his mother, spent his days in tents, was a scoundrel, a conniver, sly as a fox and, seemingly, had no moral compass whatsoever. Both Esau and Jacob went on to be the forbearer of neighboring nations, Edom (Esau) and Israel (Jacob). Unsurprisingly, like the brothers themselves, each nation was antagonistic toward the other and rejoiced in whatever misfortune came the way of the other. The only bright spot in the whole sorry tale is that at the end of their days the brothers eventually reunited with Esau forgiving Jacob for his malfeasance. When they met, Esau ran to greet Jacob, embraced him, and wept.

III.

The story of Jacob and Esau is, of course, but one story within the larger narrative which is the history of the Hebrews, the nation of Israel, as God's chosen people. Each successive story is predicated on the story which proceeded it while, at the same time, laying the foundation for the next story which it come. These stories usually contain their own unique manifestations of irony, disobedience, strange humor and, almost always, a heavy dose of divine intervention lest the story stray too far from the intended divine direction our world is meant to go.

Of course, this sprawling biblical narrative, and all the component stories it comprises, is the bedrock foundation of our own faith in that all of these stories eventually lead to the babe in the manger descended from Abraham, the ministry and miracles, the cross, the empty tomb, the gift of the Holy Spirit imparted and the church established. Finally, the latest chapter begins with all of us sitting here this today. A most impressive tale I think you will agree.

IV.

Generally speaking at this a point in any sermon, with the context clearly established, the preacher would normally encourage the congregation to take a giant step *closer* to the story. To get right in the frame and start poking around to see what lessons for our lives and truths for our time in history might be derived from such a tale. Today, however, I would like to each us to take a giant step *back* from the story.

Not so much that might see the story in light of the larger context (though there's that) but, instead, so we might come to discover that the *real* story here is the importance of having an awareness that, even now, the biblical narrative, the story of God's redemptive work in the world, and the divine plan for the cosmos is unfolding, *still*, through the stories of the saints (and sinners) who compromise the body of Christ, the church. Or, said another way, this morning I would like to lift up to you the importance of your *own* story as it unfolds in the decisions we make and the actions we take.

V.

If you *have* been around for any length of time you are aware every summer you can bank on hearing at least *one* “fish sermon.” Today I have this year’s version for you. For those who have *not* been around all that long I will tell you that at one time I was once quite the avid fisher-person. While mine is but a modest 14 ft. aluminum boat with a 15 hp engine, I once took great pride in pretty much being able to “out fish” anyone on our particular lake (Trout Lake) regardless of how much money another spend on his or her boat. I have been fishing this one particular lake, hard, for over 20 years. While there is always more to learn and no one right way to catch fish, I can say with confidence I have a thorough knowledge of the lake, the lake bottom, where which type of fish can be found at what times of the year, and which rigs, reels, rods, lures, baits, and techniques are most effective. Said another way, I own 30 fishing rods (more on that in a moment).

VI.

So avid was I, that some years ago I became a licensed New York State Fishing Guide which required me to be certified in CPR, First Aid, Water Safety, as well as to pass the basic written exam as well as the specific category exam for both Fishing and Boating. Soon after I began advertising and offering fishing charters, though just for kids. I provided all the bait and tackle, and charters would typically last for two hours (fishing time) for which I would charge \$100. This kept me in bait and boat gas all summer.

We would spend the first hour using light poles and tackle to go after small fish like perch and sunfish so the kids could learn to consistently place the worm-baited hook about a foot above the lake bottom and, most importantly, learn to set the hook once they got a nibble and reel it in with line kept tight and pole tip raised. If the bite is on and one has enough bait, these perch and sunfish can teach anyone how to catch fish. The trick is to be in the right spot, which is where Mike the Fishing Guide came in.

VII.

After each kid had caught 10 or so fish, we would swap out the light poles for larger and spend the 2nd hour out in deeper water using the same techniques to fish for bass. So confident was I in my ability to put *any* kid on a spot and have them be successful that I would guarantee every person in the

boat would catch at least *one* fish or I would waive the fee for the charter. In the 15 years I ran these charters I was *always* been paid. The real payoff for such charters, however, was seeing a kid catch a fish. Particularly for the first time. There is no greater satisfaction in the world.

All of this said, I have done very few charters the past several years, nor have I done much fishing at all for that matter. Part of this is due to my own changing priorities and time constraints, but part of it has to do with the fact that of late the fishing really has not been all that great. So much so, that up until this past week I am not all that sure I would have offered the same guarantee of “No fish, no charge.”

VIII.

All of that changed this past week, however, owing to a visit after church last Sunday to the home of Mark and Nancey Brackett. Mark was to have surgery the following day and I went to have a prayer with them. At one point Nancey got to talking about their 7 year old grandson, Porter, and his burgeoning love of fishing. Having a place on the lake themselves, they were very familiar with my propensity for taking kids fishing. She asked if I might take out Porter at some point this summer time.

So it was that on Friday morning 8:45 a.m. George Ripicky arrived with son, Porter, in tow. I could tell that Porter was *quite* excited to fish as he was already wearing his life jacket when he got out of the truck from the ride over. As we loaded into the boat and made ready to get underway, Porter had a *million* questions. Particularly about all the fishing poles I have racked on two walls of my boathouse. Though I tried to dutifully answer each question while changing the reels for his left-handed retrieve, I employed a distraction by asking him to count how many fishing poles I had. (Yes, 30 is a little over the top, no question.)

IX.

Porter and I had an absolutely *fabulous* morning fishing. It was calm and beautiful. A little overcast at first then clearing, with no wind at all of which to speak. Best of all, we dropped anchor in the first spot and we immediately started catching fish. We must have caught 30 between us in a little less than an hour. For the second hour we swapped poles and started fishing for bass with crayfish and Porter caught a few right away. The bite was on and as you

can tell from the photo, Porter was having a ball. I was having just as much fun, though I was working a little harder baiting hook after hook and untangling lines. Porter did *amazingly* well, especially for a 7 year old. He even took his own fish off the hook. Beyond that, he was a very congenial, well behaved, and a delightful kid. Oh, and he never ran out of questions. Which was great. It was one of the days, one of those experiences, which sets a story in a different direction.



X.

Just as we were approaching the two hour mark I dug for my phone to text George a pick-up time. When I did so, I saw that while Porter and I were fishing I had, coincidentally and completely out of the blue, received a text from the mom of another kid, William, whom I had also taken fishing some years earlier. The mother said, *"It's been many years since William has caught more than some bluegill or pumpkinseed fish and when this first bass catch happened he immediately referenced you and Trout Lake. Your impact on his life is permanent. How core memories are made!"* Included with a text was a photo of William, now much older, having caught a rather nice largemouth bass.



I replied, *"You really made my heart warm with your text. Thank you so much for your thoughtfulness in sending. So glad he, and you, have fond memories*

of Trout Lake.” I then sent her the photo of Porter, explaining that I was out fishing with another kid. I dug through my photos and I found a much younger William sitting in my boat with a fish and big smile much like Porter.

XI.

Later that evening, Nancey Brackett sent me a text which read, *“Wow! Did Porter ever enjoy his fishing trip. He can't stop talking about fishing (shocker). He absorbed everything and relayed to me how to fish in detail. He even drew the areas on the lake map! Thank you so much!”*

I have told you this fish tail today not because of the fish, but because of the importance and the power of the stories we are writing in how we live our lives together. Such stories frame our past and pave the way to our future. While it is certainly easy to see the significance of stories about birthright and the founding and fates of nations, less obvious are the small decisions we make about our lives and those actions which, at the time, are not perceived as being all that significant. I can tell you with certainty, however, that such acts of kindness, companionship, and community are never, ever forgotten. Even and, perhaps, especially as the years go by. Just ask Porter, just ask William.

XII.

As is well documented and commented upon elsewhere, I am winding down a career in ministry spanning 32 years (and counting). The reality of this kind of started to fall on me like a ton of bricks sometime last winter. Though the bricks are *still* falling and the dust is nowhere *near* settled, more and more I find myself reviewing the story that has been our time together; 27 years at the Church on the Park and 21 years at Brick Chapel (I got a later start as the Brick Chapel folks took some convincing to write me into the story over there/ here). While I certainly have a bit of nostalgia for that which was, and a deep longing for those who were, I must confess such reminiscing has also stirred in me a curiosity about how the story ends. Or, more correctly, how the story might (possibly) continue. That is to say, what is question which our story is intended to answer?



XIII.

It is my hope and prayer that each of us might yet awaken to the power each of us possesses in writing our stories with one another, friends, family, and neighbors, each assuming their own role. Like Jacob and Esau we, too, are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's child, we also will have a role to play in God's unfolding plan for this world.

Now, on the chance that you are sitting there in the pew listening to this sermon, or sitting there in your recliner reading these words, don't you *dare* start to thinking, "Who??? Me!!!" Remember, God has a propensity and, even, a preference to utilize flawed human beings *just* like you and me, the saints and sinners of this church, to bend the universe in the direction God intends.

As we go from here today, let us be aware of the stories we are writing for ourselves, and the stories we are helping to write for those around us and the community in which we live. Remember, our impact on the lives others is permanent. This is how core memories are made." And the people were heard to say...Amen.