



Poland Presbyterian Church

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The first in Sermon by
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The Jacob Chronicles: Cheated

Genesis 25: 19-34

¹⁹ These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, ²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²² 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. ²³ 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."*

²⁴ When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. ²⁸ Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. ³⁰ Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." ³² Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" ³³ Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

I must confess that as a child my mind would often wander when I sat in the congregation during worship, especially the sermon. For some reason preaching just didn't hold my attention. Consequently, I devised a host of different ways to get myself through the 30 minute sermon. My favorite activity was to count the number of tiles in the ceiling... now that was exciting!! But as I got older I began to read the stories in the Bible. Something just didn't connect! These were great stories! David and Goliath was a fascinating story for a young boy to hear. That story spoke to me and said that a youngster like me could make a difference and didn't need to fear the "giants" who threatened. I wondered how the church could take such fabulous stories and make them dull!

The stories in Genesis have all the components of good drama. There is nothing dull about them. They are filled with romance, conflict, lust, war, humor and sin. During the next 6 weeks I will be looking at the stories about Jacob. His importance to the Old Testament cannot be overstated. He was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the later history of the Hebrew people began with his life. These phenomenal stories reveal a great deal about human nature, God, relationships and spiritual development. They are also contemporary stories, and it is not hard to place ourselves in the midst of them and understand our own lives in terms of them.

I

For a few moments, let us imagine that this drama from Genesis is a modern one. It is about a squabbling family. We might use the word "dysfunctional" to describe it. They are referred to a family therapist and her report reads like this:

*" **Case # 3244.** The Abrahamson family is highly conflicted. The primary reason for the referral to therapy was because of an intense rivalry that developed between the two sons: Jacob and Esau. They are fraternal twins, but there is little similarity, physical, psychological or social. Esau is muscular, ruddy and large boned. His preferences are for physical work and he enjoys the outdoors. He has a high need for immediate gratification and often makes poor choices because of this. He has a quick temper and often threatens violence. He recently threatened his brother's life claiming that Jacob cheated him out of his birthright.*

"Jacob is finer featured physically. He appears to be somewhat introverted. Nonetheless he practices risky behaviors relying on his intuition as a guide. He prefers domestic environments and eschews physical labor. He is an accomplished cook and is more intelligent than both his father Isaac, and his brother Esau. Jacob also has a number of pathological personality traits. First, his personality has not matured. He is highly self-centered and believes that the world exists for him. He is sneaky and manipulative and this appears to be the source of a great deal of conflict. Jacob has a vivid imagination but has not found a productive use for it. He is also narcissistic and I fear this will impede any maturity or psychological development. It is apparent that he indeed cheated his brother on a number of occasions.

"The conflict between the two siblings is exacerbated by poor parenting. Both parents play favorites with their children. Isaac, the father, outwardly favors Esau. Esau is the natural heir of Isaac's possessions and family stature. Esau is aware of this favoritism and plays on it, often bringing his father game from his hunting to curry favor. Isaac also has a lot of unresolved personal issues. He appears to have endured some type of trauma as a child. The trauma is related to his relationship with his father, Abraham. It has impacted Isaac's social interactions. Consequently, Isaac is withdrawn both emotionally and spiritually. Although he comes from a very religious family, he rarely speaks of this, indicating some type of trauma or abuse. His symptoms are exacerbated by his progressive blindness.

"Isaac is also of low/average intelligence. He is able to function in his reasonably unsophisticated world, but complex situations, especially relationships, bewilder and frustrate him. He shares this

with his son Esau. Rebecca, the mother, is quite intelligent and seems to be the unacknowledged leader of the family. Given the patriarchal culture, her intelligence is often manifest in passive and manipulative behaviors. She favors Jacob and shares these characteristics with him.

Isaac and Rebecca seem to have a working relationship, but it is neither developed nor intense. Rebecca became pregnant with the twins at a later age, and had a very difficult pregnancy. Part of the family legend is that the conflict between Jacob and Esau began in her womb, causing the difficult pregnancy. Rebecca, in spite of her cunning and often antisocial behavior, is quite devout and spends a great deal of time in prayer and reflecting on spiritual matters.

One might conclude from this analysis that the Abrahamson family is highly dysfunctional and that conflict will continue unless there is some intervention. There is a strong possibility that this conflict could become violent. All of this is fueled by Isaac's poor health and questions surrounding the family inheritance."

Do you get the picture? Why is this story so important? I have updated the events and even made them modern in terms of psychological theory, but the question remains: "So what? One more dysfunctional family!"

II

This story, and the ones that follow are important for our generation because they reveal a great deal about God. The events are like a soap opera, with one exception. God is the primary player in this drama.

We discover that God is not bound by human weakness and inabilities. God uses dysfunctional families, immature and narcissistic young men, manipulating spouses, and hard working stiffs to accomplish his purposes. God's choice of people, to be His people, does not make always sense to human beings. (There must have been healthier families around.. why didn't God choose them?) This quality of God is both mystifying and hopeful! Why does God choose whom God chooses? But then, consider Jesus. He picked some very ordinary people to lead an amazing revolution of the spirit. Fisherman! Tax collectors! Harlots and outcasts! This is the story of God that is revealed to us in the pages of the Bible. It is a story of hope!

- It is hopeful because it reveals that human beings have the capacity to change and grow. We can mature and our lives can be purposeful.
- It is hopeful, because it tells us that God can take the most messed up family, and bring forth from that family leadership that makes a difference in the world.
- It is hopeful because it says to every person who comes from a dysfunctional home... "You can rise above it."

It also reminds us to be careful in our judgments of others. God sees people differently!

III

Finally, this narrative reveals the way that God works in the lives of human beings. It reveals that God does not accept the limitations of custom and norm. God disregarded the patriarchal culture of that day, and communicated His plan and intention, not to Isaac but the Rebecca. The custom of that day would bestow everything on Esau, (the family blessing and the inheritance,) because he was the older, albeit a few minutes. God is neither a respecter of tradition nor custom.

It reveals that amidst the soap operas of our lives, with its intrigue and craziness, there is a purpose. God is working toward an end that we may not perceive. God may be calling you or me to a task that we may not understand nor believe is possible. This is the significance of "the Jacob Chronicles." A spoiled brat, a narcissistic, "momma's boy"; a kid who people thought would amount to nothing... becomes the parent of 12 tribes and a nation that would bear his future name: Israel.

The history only begins in this mixed up mess of a family... and the next five sermons will take us on a journey where we see God at work, shaping, changing, calling, and interceding.

But today the story is of a muddled mess of a boy, in a dysfunctional family. It is the story of that same boy cheating his older brother. That is where it begins.. yet it ends in hope...

Consider, your beginning... your family of origin, your secret sins and flaws... they are the beginning of a personal story. It is purposeful and indeed, it too, will also end in hope... by the grace of God. Amen.