**July 15, 2020 Genesis 25:19-34**

***About Grace***

**Scripture:**

*(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. Genesis 25:19-34 NRSV*

**Notes:**

1. WE are so much like ***Jacob*** and ***Esau***.
   1. Esau was consumed by his ***appetites***.
   2. Jacob, did things ***his*** ***own*** ***way***.
   3. God sees all: and yet He still ***loves*** us.
2. God is faithful to the ***covenant***.
   1. Jacob got out of the mess by admitting his ***greed***.
   2. Pride or self-importance keeps your sight, on your ***self***.
3. It’s all about ***grace***.
   1. God’s loving ***Grace*** redeems us.
   2. We can’t earn our ***salvation***.
   3. ***Salvation*** comes by admitting we can’t do it on our own.
   4. Admit we are first class sinners in need of ***help***.
   5. Jesus went to the cross and opened his arms in ***forgiveness***.
   6. The heart of living the resurrection lifestyle is ***forgiveness***.
4. We’re called to live a ***Resurrection*** lifestyle that mirrors the example of Christ
   1. A lifestyle of ***forgiveness***.
   2. ***Love*** requires us to be vulnerable,
   3. With the Lord by our side we can do ***anything***.
   4. Accept the ***grace*** of God through Christ to live the resurrection life.

**Script:**

I have always thought of the story of Jacob and Esau as an interesting story. I never really looked at it for lessons about our world and how we should be in it. I thought that Jacob was a great man, after all His descendants make up the Jewish nation; most of the stories in the bible are tied to him in some way; and he does live a nice long life. But as I look at the story of Jacob and Esau’s birth, I am able to see with different eyes. I see myself in the actions of Jacob. I also see myself in the actions of his brother Esau. And I wonder do we all have these same general characteristics instilled in our DNA?

We all have character flaws, idiosyncrasies that make us who we are. Attitudes that lead us to be self-centered. Desires that lead us to be greedy and demanding, and the audacity to believe that others will fall for our deceit. Yet we do not like to be humiliated, we don’t like to be belittled, and we have no desire to be poked fun at, even when it is all in fun. So when it happens to us, we tend to hide our true feelings and move on the best we can.

I imagine that is how Esau felt when his twin brother Jacob took advantage of his situation and bargained for his birthright. Some believe that Jacob was deceitful, a prankster, or a trickster, but I am not sure; as I look at this passage I can see this in two ways: Jacob was either shrewd (taking advantage of a situation); or deceitful (stealing what should have been his brothers in his brother’s weakness). That is part of what we are looking at today as we open to Genesis 25:19-34. Join me in the reading our sermon passage today from 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. Genesis 25:19-34 NRSV*

We find out from this passage in Genesis, that from the very beginning, Jacob and his brother Esau didn’t get along. They played WWF in their mother’s womb. It was such a difficult pregnancy that Rebekah asked God if she could just die instead of going on. But God wouldn’t let her quit. God had plans for her offspring. Rebekah finally made it to the delivery room and none to soon. The boys even fought over who would be born first. Jacob was pushing and shoving trying to be first in line. Esau was stronger and beat him to it but Jacob was born grabbing at his heals. His name, Jacob, even meant *“heel.”* That name sort of has a double meaning in our society. A double meaning that fit Jacob quite well, for Jacob turned out to be a real heel. The name Jacob also meant to replace or to grab and as we find out, he was very grabby.

Jacob would have made a good villain for Batman in the comics or the old TV series. My favorites were the Joker and the Penguin. Well Jacob could have been the Trickster. He was sort of an Old Testament Ferris Beuller. Remember the movie, Ferris Beuller’s Day Off? About a teenage boy who decides to skip school one day and takes his best friend and girlfriend along for the ride, only they were the ones who paid the bigger price.

Well, that’s the sort of life that Jacob the Trickster lead. He was rebellious, self-centered, focused on himself and only himself. He would twist and break every rule possible, just to see if he could get away with it. He was very likable. he was lucky. Luck just seemed to follow him. Wherever he went, whatever he did, he always came out smelling like a rose when he really should have had his nose rubbed in it and sat in the corner for about a million years.

That was Jacob’s attitude. That was the attitude which lead him to steal his brother’s birthright. Now what you need to understand is that the first born son was the one who received his father’s blessing and was the recipient of the lion’s share of the estate. The first born received two thirds of the estate and the rest was divided up among the rest of the heirs. The first born also became the head of the household when the father died. It was a position of power and a traditional blessing came with it. It was a blessing which empowered the first born with God’s blessing. So here’s Jacob the Grabby, Jacob the Trickster, Jacob the Heel and he’s jealous because he wasn’t the first born. All of his life he’s been trying to think of a way to get Esau’s place in life without resorting to murder.

Esau wasn’t a whole lot better. He was nothing but a bunch of appetites gone wild. He was a big hairy man with red hair. He came in one day after a failed hunting trip, just starving to death. Jacob the Trickster saw his opportunity and he took it. He was cooking lentil stew and added something to make it look red and meaty. Esau saw it, his stomach growled and he told his little brother to give him some of that red stuff, and hurry. The Trickster had him. He had him and bargained with him to sell his birthright for that bowl of red stuff, that bowl of mock beef stew. Esau’s appetite got the better of him and he sold his birthright to the Trickster for a bowl of lentil soup and was tricked twice.

WE are so much like Jacob and Esau. We won’t admit it, but we’re a lot like Jacob and Esau. At times we’re like Esau: we’re consumed by our appetites and we sell our birthright for a mess of cheap lentil soup, or something less appealing and even less filling. When that happens, life can get pretty messy. Especially if those appetites get out of control. Or lead to addiction and a life that is out of control.

Other times we’re like Jacob, grabbing for things that are not ours, doing things our way, pushing the rules to the limit, obeying the letter of the law and stretching it to see how far we can bend it, pushing our relationship with God to the limits and seeing just how far we can go. Sometimes we’re like the Trickster We rationalize our behaviors, our wrong attitudes and inappropriate actions. We go to amazing, and sometimes very complicated, lengths to get OUR way. I wonder how the God puts up with us, how does this make Jesus feel, our wayward, bleating, stubborn shenanigans in the name of God; and God sees it all: every “*roll of the eyes*”, each “*I am better than you are*” look; every ugly act; every snide and cutting remark. AND YET He still loves us. Jesus still works ceaselessly to draw us into relationship with him, to bring us back to Him, and to bless each of us, no matter what we have done.

And that is the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus works ceaselessly to bless us and carry out God’s end of the Covenant: God is able to redeem even our worst effort. And that’s a major part of what the story of Jacob and Esau is all about. God is faithful to the covenant. Jacob trusted in God’s promise and purpose. His only downfall was that he tried to get there on his own power and ability. And that’s when he got in trouble. All of his tricks; all of his selfishness and all of his rationalizations caught up with him. God was faithful but Jacob had to admit his greed, He had to admit his winner take all and win at any cost attitude before he could claim the inheritance, which God had promised. The only way Jacob got out of the greedy and deceptive mess he had created for himself, was to admit his greed and self-centeredness.

Have you ever been self-centered? Of course you have. When we are SELF centered we think the whole world revolves around us. We don’t want to bend, we don’t want to buckle, it’s our way of the Highway. Unfortunately we’re sadly mistaken and often times, we wind up terribly embarrassed. I remember a story I heard of Willard Scott from the TODAY SHOW, Willard said he had a chance to fly into a small community airport; it only had a single runway and one small hangar. As he was getting off the plane he noticed a group of about 75 people all of them were cheering and clapping. So, he made a sweeping bow and waved. And that was when he noticed that the folks weren’t watching him at all. They were watching an air show. Pride or self-importance; it keeps your sight, your vision, your focal point on your self. When that happens, pretty soon, you begin to think that God and everybody else owes you something.

But you want to know what the really good news is, IT’S ALL ABOUT GRACE. Paul reminds us that none of us got here on our own. We all got here the same way, through the Grace and mercy of Jesus Christ our Savior. It’s not our works or our deeds, it’s God’s loving Grace that redeems us. It’s not what we do, but what God has done for us that gives us meaning and purpose. When we depend upon ourselves, when we depend on what is called *“works righteousness”*, we only set ourselves up to fail.

We can’t earn our salvation. We aren’t redeemed because we can recite beautiful prayers. We aren’t reconciled to God because we work so hard in the Church. We aren’t justified by all of our good deeds or the committees we serve on. If we could earn our own salvation, then Jesus wouldn’t have had to die on the cross. It is nothing that we have done on our own. It is simply what Christ has done for us.

Our salvation comes the same way Paul’s came by admitting that we can’t do it on our own, by admitting that all of our tricks; all of our selfish rationalizing; all of our work so that God will like us is for naught. Like Paul we have to admit that we are first class sinners in need of help. Help like only the Son of God can give. Paul reminds us that Jesus came as one of us. He was just like Jacob, just like you and me. Human with all the temptations that you and I have every single day. He could have done all the things Jacob did or the things that you and I have done. Just like Jacob, Jesus could have done things a little more quickly on his own, that’s what the temptations in the wilderness were all about; taking shortcuts to God’s promises. The main difference between Jacob and Jesus is that Jesus didn’t try to take the shortcut to God’s promise. Jesus didn’t try to take the painless way. Instead, Jesus went to the cross and opened his arms in forgiveness. And forgiveness is at the heart of life in the spirit.

I read a story of an east Texas town which decided to have an Easter pageant. All the townspeople came together and planned all the details of the Easter story. They needed someone who could carry the heavy cross through the town, so they chose the biggest, burliest, redneck guy in town to play the part of Jesus because he was the only one strong enough to endure the long road to the hillside where the crucifixion would take place. The townspeople lined the street and jeering at the redneck Jesus as he made his way through the center of town. One of his friends got a bit carried away. As the redneck Jesus walked by, his friend spit at him and cried, *“Crucify him! Crucify him!”* This really got to the redneck and in a voice heard above the noise of the crowd, he hollered: *“You just wait until after the resurrection and I’ll get you.”*

That could have been Jesus’ response to the crowds all along the Way of the Cross. Jesus could have looked out at the crowds who mocked him as he struggled, he could have looked at the Roman guards and the Jewish leaders, he could have looked at the disciples who deserted him and said, *“You just wait until after the resurrection and I’ll get you!”* He was just as human as you and I and the redneck Jesus of that pageant. Jesus could have responded like that but he didn’t. With nails in his hands and feet, with a crown of thorns jammed on his head, with his back a bloody mess from the whipping he had received, with blood flowing from his side from the beating he endured, Jesus looked out at the crowd and said, *“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.”* The heart of our life in the spirit, the heart of living the resurrection lifestyle is forgiveness. We’re simply called to accept the forgiveness which God offers through Jesus.

When Paul Powers was seven years old, his mother died of pneumonia. After his mother’s death, Paul’s father became an alcoholic. He also began beating Paul on a regular basis. Paul joined a street gang for protection. he spent all his time in stealing and street fights. At twelve, Paul accidentally killed a woman. He spent four years in a juvenile prison. At 17, he was removed from the prison and put in the care of an elderly couple He called them Mom and Dad Adams. The Adams loved Paul in spite of his violent temper and rough ways. They were always ready to forgive him and offer a second chance. Through their influence and a message at an evangelistic crusade, Paul Powers gave his life to Jesus.

A few years after giving his life to Christ, Paul met and fell in love with a young woman named Margaret. Margaret loved Paul, but after hearing of his rough life, wasn’t sure about marrying him. So one day, Paul took Margaret walking on the beach. Margaret remarked that just as the tide was washing out their footprints, maybe their relationship would soon be washed away too. But Paul assured her that he was fully committed to her for life. That night they became engaged. After their romantic walk, Margaret returned to her room and wrote a poem I have read that it is a poem that has inspired millions. You may know the poem as *“The Footprints in the Sand.”* Paul Powers did not become the kind of man that Margaret could love because he made up his mind to do so. Paul Powers was changed by the power of Christ’s love. That’s Grace. That is the only way real change ever comes, we can’t do it on our own.

We’re called to live what Paul calls *“Life in the Spirit.”* We’re called to live a Resurrection lifestyle. A lifestyle that mirrors the example that Christ set when he walked among man A lifestyle of putting others ahead of yourself, of service; a lifestyle of loving others even if they have a bad attitude; A lifestyle of forgiveness. A lifestyle that is not afraid to stand up for what is right, even if it means making a sacrifice. And it’s hard.

It’s oh so hard, even with our full dependence upon the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to turn the other cheek when we are offended by the comments of others, it is difficult to love those who challenge our belief’s, it is difficult to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and house the homeless. This kind of love requires us to be vulnerable, vulnerable to ridicule, vulnerable to hatred, vulnerable to bigotry, vulnerable to discrimination.

It’s impossible to do this on our own strength and abilities; like Jacob we can’t get out of the stew of our own making, we need God’s help. But with the Lord by our side we can do it, with the Lord by our side we can do anything. This morning I challenge you to trust God, and trust in the promises of God. Listen for His still small voice to instruct you, to encourage you, and to guide you, accept the forgiveness which God offers to you. Accept the grace of God through Christ to live the resurrection life. Trust in God and not yourself.