

[16 PENT 1stLU Jacob's Dream]

16 PENTECOST

FIRST, MARSHALL

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Genesis 27:1-5a, 15-23, 28:10-17; John 1:50-51

*Jacob's Dream**Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

As I mentioned in the announcements, central to our story today is the man named **Jacob**...

You heard from the bible passage: he is the recipient of the bountiful blessing given by God first to Abraham, and then to Jacob's father Isaac. It's heaven's stamp of approval that the Lord will help bring these promises into reality – He promises Jacob a land for his people, countless descendants, and a promise that through him, all people on earth will be blessed. Jacob, out of all the people on earth, is God's chosen servant...

Jacob **also** in his young age, happens to be...a scoundrel, a rascal, a cheat and a thief – and he comes by it naturally. You remember the back story – Isaac and Rebekah are married, she gets pregnant and discovers that she's going to have twins – good news, right...? ...except for this fact: the twins give her no rest – even before they're born, they wrestle inside her like they're fighting over who will get to be born first.



Rebekah is **so** concerned about this **struggle** going on in her **womb** that she seeks out the Lord who tells her:

*Two nations are in your womb,  
 And two peoples born of you will be divided;  
 The one shall be stronger than the other,  
 The elder shall serve the younger.*  
 (Genesis 25:23)

Now, remember – back in those days, the **oldest** son was always the avored. He would inherit the **birthright** – the largest share of his parents’ estate. He’d also inherit the **family blessing** – a gift of a promising future for entire clan.

When the two boys are finally born, Esau comes out first, but Jacob follows close behind, in fact he comes out of his mom holding onto the heel of his older brother. So it’s no surprise to hear that the name **Jacob**, in its **verb** form, means to **overthrow** or to **oust**. Basically it carries a sense of being **greedy** or being a **cheat**. ***So the kid never has a chance, right?*** I mean, if you name your child “cheater” what’s he gonna grow up and do??? Cheat!!

Well, years pass, the two boys grow – and they develop into very different personalities. Where Esau is a man’s man, a big, strong, hairy guy who loves to hunt, work outside, and cook meat over a campfire...Jacob, we’re told, is a quiet man who likes to stay at home.

Well, as we soon discover, Jacob is anything BUT a shy, retiring, Caspar Milquetoast. Turns out, while Esau’s *outside* **doing** stuff, Jacob is *inside* **planning** stuff – scheming, in fact, about how to overcome that pesky birth order thing.

There’s an old saying that reads: *The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach*??? Well, Jacob figured out that the *stomach* is also the way to some men’s wallet!!



One day when a hungry Esau comes in from working the fields, he steps into camp only to have his nose grabbed by the enticing aroma of a stew that Jacob just happens to be cooking. The older brother tells the younger, *Let me have some of that stuff – I’m starving to death!!!*

*Sure*, says Jacob as he fills a bowl to the brim. Then he pauses and says, *But first...give me your birthright*. So Esau says, ***Fine! I’m dying here! It’s yours!!***...and the deal is done. He gives his birthright...for a bowl of beans. His future... for a little food. His heritage...for some porridge, some pottage, some soup, some stew...

Sometime later, their father’s health really starts to fail – Isaac is blind, he’s in pain, he knows that his days are numbered. So he tells Esau, ***his*** favorite son, *Go, kill a deer and fix me a meal that I’ll really enjoy...and then...I’ll give you my blessing*.

Their mom *overhears* this conversation...then shares it with **her** favorite son: Jacob. Then she tells him, ***You*** go kill a goat, ***I’ll*** fix his favorite meal, ***you*** pretend that you’re ***Esau***...and your father will give ***you*** the blessing...

I can’t tell if this is a plot for an old ***Jerry Springer show*** – or a ***soap opera!!***

Well, that’s **exactly** what happens...

- Jacob kills the goats
- Rebekah cooks them the way Isaac loves
- They tie goat skins on the backs of Isaac’s hands and neck
- And Jacob dresses in his brother’s clothes
- Then he enters his blind father’s tent and claims to be Esau

- He even pulls God into the lie by saying that the Lord blessed his hunting
- In the end, Isaac is fooled, and gives Esau's blessing to Jacob.

Now, if you were Esau and discovered that your younger brother – who had already tricked you out of your birthright – has **also** stolen your blessing...*what would you want to do to him???* The bible tells us that as soon as their dad finally dies, Esau promises to kill Jacob.



So...with his big brother's threats ringing in his ears, the younger brother hits the road, gets out of Dodge in the middle of the night, and takes his stolen birthright and blessing with him...he wins, right?

*So...what's the message that we might be tempted to take away from these painful episodes in the brothers' lives?*

- It's OK to cheat as long as you don't get caught – or killed in the process?
- Forget the commandment about STEALING – and the other two about COVETING – life is short – take what you can and don't worry about anyone else!

No, that's not the point. Always remember this: though these bible stories all have a cast of actors (and some, like Jacob, are VERY colorful in their loose morals or cheating ways) – the story is ALWAYS first about GOD – in fact, the main point is always to tell us something VERY **important** about GOD.

**So with that change of focus, what would you say is the point about God that we should discover in this event?**

Believe it or not, this is a story about God's grace.



Jacob is so afraid of his older brother that he hits the road, leaving with little more than the clothes on his back. The first night he spends under the stars with a rock for a pillow – sounds like a formula for a great night's sleep, right? No wonder he dreams of angels on a stairway to heaven!!

In his dream, though, he senses God standing beside him. The Almighty says, *I am THE LORD, and I will bless you with a land, with countless descendants, and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*

In Jacob's young life, his behavior has been occasionally good, often bad, and sometimes downright ugly! But still, God chose him BEFORE he was even born. The blessings God wanted to give Jacob had nothing at all to do with his character...and everything to do with the unconditional grace of an unconditionally gracious God.

We may not like this...we may want God:

- to **punish** those who cheat and **reward** those who don't,
- to cause **bad** things to happen to **bad** people, not the other way around,
- to notice the **good** things we do and give us credit for:
  - how we live (*for the most part*), and
  - how we treat our neighbors (*sometimes*)...
- and then turn a **blind eye** to the **sins** we *do* commit...

...because really, we're not as bad as terrible sinners like Jacob, right?

Trouble is...this is ***not*** a story about God keeping score and **rewarding** those with the ***most points***.

Of course God wants us to be kind, to care for people in need, to always do the right thing...

But Jacob's story tells us a couple of things that are vital about God:

1. When it comes to God's plan to bless the world...none of that other stuff makes a difference – who's good/who's bad, who's been naughty or nice...God really doesn't care **what** we've **been** or **what** we've **done**...
2. However, God cares **passionately** about **whose we are and *who we will become*!!!**

Jesus tells a story in Luke's Gospel to some people who "*trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt.*"

Two men go up to the temple to pray: one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee prays, ***Thank you God that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers – or even like this tax collector!***

The tax collector, on the other hand, was beating his breast and saying, ***God, be merciful to me, a sinner!***

Jesus says to the crowd, ***I tell you, the tax collector was the only one who went home justified.***

Over and over again, God calls people who appear to have serious character flaws...and then sets about re-molding their clay, re-fashioning their spirit, re-creating them from selfish sinner to almost-a-saint, from offensive outlaw to exceptional citizen, from greedy grabber to surprising servant of God...

Although...maybe it's not so surprising after all... That same truth is revealed every time you and I take a look in the mirror, right? At least, it's true for me!!



Nothing good that we do in life will make God love us any more...  
Nothing bad we do in life will make God love us any less...

God is gracious and eager to shower us with blessings so that you and I can be a part of that plan to bless all the families of the earth with some very good news. God loves us...in fact, **GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON...** Said John the Baptist when Jesus began his ministry: ***Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!***

What we learn about God in this story about Jacob is that the Lord will use every one of us to bless our families and friends, our neighbors near and far, strangers across the street and far across the ocean. God will use every one of us to bless all people with the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.