

JACOB AND ESAU
GENESIS 25
JULY 12 2020

Oh my goodness this is wonderful stuff!

Once again I'm having to choose from among at least a dozen themes and really powerful depths in this chapter

So I just did thatand...here we go!

It's kind of like a soap opera from week to week as we follow this family, isn't it?

All families are different in ways,
and then

all families are the same in lots of ways.

Half the time when I'm reading these stories, I'm thinking – I'm glad I didn't live then and with these people

and the other half I'm thinking – hey that's just like me. Just like my brother, or sister, or....
you know?

So as they do in soap operas I'm going to bring you up to date on what's happened so far to bring us to where we are today.

It all starts with a woman named Sarai and a man named Abram. They are living, settled, content, in a place called Ur

when they are called by God to leave everything and follow.

Follow to where? They don't know.

How long will it take? They don't know.

All they know is that God says

Follow me. It's going to be so cool (that's my translation)

I'll be your God, and you be my people

and I promise you three things.

1) a land of your own

2) descendants as many....

3) I promise I'll be with you. Always. I'll never leave you.

AND – through you – all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Wanna come?

And they did. They did.

They followed – whatever it was in them that convinced them it was the voice of God, that deep sense of knowing led them.

Remember that promise of descendants as many as...

Yeah.

There was a little problem with that.
They were old already
and they had no children. Not even one.

At one point Sarah decided to help God along. she's close to 80.....she's thinking there's been a mistake. Maybe – maybe if Abraham had a child with my slave girl Hagar, she reasoned....maybe.....

so that's what happened. Hagar is a foreign child, a slave. She is given to Abraham (this is not Sarah's finest moment) and in fact gives birth to a son. God's angel had told her that his name would be Ishmael, and that he too would be blessed by God with many descendants.

Once Sarah sees Hagar, with the baby that she has been unable to bear, she is unable to bear THAT, and sends Hagar and Ishmael away into the desert. To give them their freedom? To have them die? This too is not Sarah's finest moment.

Hagar and Ishmael both survive, are seen and heard by God, and they flourish in the lands next to the lands of Sarah and Abraham.

In due time when Abe is 99 and Sarah 90, they receive messengers who tell them that Sarah will indeed bear a child; a son. She laughs. Abraham laughs. God laughs too, and the baby is born. They call him Isaac, which means...laughter.

Sarah dies at the age of 127, the story teller tells us. Abraham, knowing that his own death is near, wants to die knowing that Isaac will be alright. For him this means married. Settled, And not only that, but married to and settled down with a girl from home. From the land they left behind all those years ago.

He sends his servant off to that land to “get a wife for Isaac”. One surprising little note about that encounter.....twice in the whole long story about how all that happens....the servant meets Rebecca at the well....twice in that story the narrator tells us that this will only happen if Rebecca herself consents.

So Isaac and Rebecca marry. The promise made to A and S continues.....And that's where today's episode begins. With Isaac and Rebecca, about to carry on the family.

And, as often in families, the carrying on begins by a death. At the death of a mom or a dad, thingsshift, do you find? Not in a bad way, not necessarily. It's painful, to be sure, ...but with the pain there comes a shifting. Inside you. And in the family.

So,this story of Isaac and Rebecca....begins by telling us about the death of Abraham. In this reading there is one verse that gives me so much hope – you might want to listen for it and guess which one it is.

KEVIN AND I READ

As Sarah before her and Rachel after her, Rebecca is barren. At another time, in another sermon it would be good to explore that theme. When a theme appears in a book over and over, or in your dreams....you can be pretty sure that there is a message there beyond the literal, wouldn't you say? A question is being raised, a wondering, a digging deep, that has nothing to do with the bearing of children.

That's not where we're going today but it's worth thinking about.

Rebecca and Isaac are unable to have children. And finally, after prayer on both their parts, she conceives. Twins.

You know, when any story starts out: "There were two brothers..." you just know there's going to be trouble. That's another of those recurring themes through all of scripture. There were two siblings....

and that's how families are. Brothers and sisters, womb mates, some of the most intense relationships you have.

Here, it begins in the womb, it says. They fought in her womb, and Rebecca says something like – this isn't how it was going to be....get me a hot water bottle and just leave me alone... something like that. I've never been pregnant but women often share pregnancy stories and that one isn't uncommon.

The romantic idea of being pregnant sort of goes down the toilet literally with the first bout of morning sickness.

The babies are born, Esau first, with Jacob behind, grasping his brother's heel.

This matters very much. In this culture, the first born inherits. It matters very much who is born first.

The boys couldn't be more different. You must have seen that in families too? Siblings even blood siblings can often be so different you wonder if they grew up in the same house. Jacob is the kid who is soft, a dreamer, a schemer, who likes to stay indoors and help his mom. Esau loves to be outside. A hunter, a man of the field it says.

Isaac's favourite was Esau. Rebecca's favourite was Jacob.

WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG? There's another whole sermon in here about parents who have favourites. The pain, the damage, the broken relationships that can result.....Isaac had grown up as the favourite in his family....he's repeating a pattern here. Rebecca has been told that the younger would serve the elder...is this why Jacob is her favourite? Is that an excuse? Absolutely not

what could possibly go wrong when parents have favourites? You probably know. In your guts. I certainly do....and in this family?

Well you know part of it. Jacob tricks Esau into selling his birthright for soup.

And that's where we leave them today.

Two things

1) This story is a story that is ancient, ancient. From the time before writing. It's been told around campfires, repeated to children, used to make the long nights in the fields more interesting, and more than that, told and retold to explain the animosity between Jews and Arabs. Edomites.

The brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau
are at least at one level

ways of speaking about the hard and bitter relationships in the middle east then. And now.

It started in the womb, they say. No one can remember a time when it wasn't so....

Esau's name is a play on words, meaning "red and hairy" which in Hebrew is a pun on the word Edom, the nation next to Israel at that time. So it's a political commentary on that level.

And it's told from the perspective of the Jews...the descendants of Jacob. If the Edomites were telling this story, and they surely did, it would sound quite different I'm sure.

It's told from the perspective of the underdog....Israel....the tiny, powerless nation in the midst of stronger nations.....yet another story where God turns over, turns on its head, the expectations of who is the most important, who deserves the blessing,
the story of God who bestows – always unexpectedly because we fall into the values of our society so easily....

God who bestows the unexpected gift of life in situations of despair. Blessing to those to whom the blessing would be denied.

Finally – that verse I told you is the one that leaps out at me and gives me hope.

Given what we know about Middle Eastern politics today....and in any recent memory...

given what we know about our own politics

and how bitter and divisive and painful and unnecessarily deceitful, cruel, and violent we can be with one another

given all that, represented by

Jacob on one side, Esau on the other

and before them

Isaac on one side, Ishmael on the other

nations forever at odds with one another,

yet, the Bible insists

and insists again

yet they are brothers.

Whatever else they are they are brothers.

And ...here it comes...

vs 8 – 10

In the end, when their dad died, they come together to bury him.

When something dies, or someone dies,

something else is born. The Veil kind of opens and offers an opportunity

for healing
for a re-commitment to one another and to the one who gave us both life
Abraham was old and full of years it says
and was gathered to his people
and so were his sons. Gathered to their people – to one another – at least for that moment
they recognize that there might be reconciliation
there's an opening
a promise
and I think they both looked deep into that cave, then at each other.
and Isaac laughed. And Ishmael laughed
and God laughed too.

and then – they looked up at the stars
and then to the road ahead, which looked different in their light.