

**SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST
JULY 16, 2023
ESAU AND JACOB**



ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: The Word is a lamp and a light. The word illuminates our life.

Many: We welcome The Word with praise and thanksgiving.

One: The Word comes from the mouth of God and accomplishes its purpose.

Many: We hear The Word that loves and embraces, challenges and convicts, renews and restores.

One: The Word is life, offers a future with hope, and creates peace in the midst of the storm.

Many: We receive The Word among us with rejoicing. We worship The Word in spirit and in truth!

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION:** Creator, your presence among us illuminates our lives. Make us fertile soil, receptive to the seeds planted by your word. Nourish us with Living Water and grow us through the energy of your empowered and healing rays of sunshine. Let us encounter you afresh as we gather in community. May our worship show our love for you and each other. Make your presence known to us and through us for your glory. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: “God of the Ages, History’s Maker”
SUNG TO THE TUNE “MORNING HAS BROKEN”**

Words by Margaret Clarkson

**“God of the ages, history’s Maker.
Planning our pathway, holding us fast,
Shaping in mercy all that concerns us:
Yahweh, we praise you, Lord of the past.**

**“God of this morning, gladly your children
Worship before you, trustingly bow:
Teach us to know you always among us,
Quietly sovereign – Lord of our now.**

“God of tomorrow, strong overcomer,

**Princes of darkness own your command:
What then can harm us? We are your people,
Now and forever kept by your hand.**

**“Lord of past ages, Lord of this morning,
Lord of the future, help us, we pray:
Teach us to trust you, love and obey you,
Crown you each moment, Lord of today.”**

***PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

God our Redeemer, the words of our mouths often lead to hurt and harm. We tear down when we could build up. We speak of death and destruction when the power of life resides in our tongues. We say what is unnecessary and unhelpful while hesitating to offer encouragement and hope. Transform our speech as you write your word into our hearts. Stir us to speak life, joy, and love in all things. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:** Romans 8:1 tells us, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” God does not shame or condemn; rather, the One who is holy makes us holy, restored, and whole. Receive the grace of God as it is freely given. Be empowered by the one who observes you and declares your good. Know that you are loved, forgiven, and transformed in Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE LESSON FROM Genesis 25:19-34

Jacob and Esau are born

¹⁹ These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham’s son. Abraham became the father of Isaac. ²⁰ Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah the daughter of Bethuel the

Aramean and the sister of Laban the Aramean, from Paddan-aram. ²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, since she was unable to have children. The LORD was moved by his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² But the boys pushed against each other inside of her, and she said, “If this is what it’s like, why did it happen to me?”

So she went to ask the LORD. ²³ And the LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb; two different peoples will emerge from your body. One people will be stronger than the other; the older will serve the younger.”

²⁴ When she reached the end of her pregnancy, she discovered that she had twins. ²⁵ The first came out red all over, clothed with hair, and she named him Esau. ²⁶ Immediately afterward, his brother came out gripping Esau’s heel, and she named him Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when they were born.

Jacob acquires the oldest son’s rights

²⁷ When the young men grew up, Esau became an outdoorsman who knew how to hunt, and Jacob became a quiet man who stayed at home. ²⁸ Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. ²⁹ Once when Jacob was boiling stew, Esau came in from the field hungry ³⁰ and said to Jacob, “I’m starving! Let me devour some of this red stuff.” That’s why his name is Edom.

³¹ Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright today.”

³² Esau said, “Since I’m going to die anyway, what good is my birthright to me?”

³³ Jacob said, “Give me your word today.” And he did. He sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ So Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew. He ate, drank, got up, and left, showing just how little he thought of his birthright.

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 8:1-11

Set free by the Spirit

8 So now there isn’t any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ God has done what was impossible for the Law, since it was weak because of selfishness. God condemned sin in the body by sending his own Son to deal with sin in the same body as humans, who are controlled by sin. ⁴ He did this so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us. Now the way we live is based on the Spirit, not based on selfishness. ⁵ People whose lives are based on selfishness think about selfish things, but people whose lives are based on the Spirit think about things that are related to the Spirit. ⁶ The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death, but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace. ⁷ So the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God. It doesn’t submit to God’s Law, because it can’t. ⁸ People who are self-centered aren’t able to please God.

⁹ But you aren’t self-centered. Instead you are in the Spirit, if in fact God’s Spirit lives in you. If anyone doesn’t have the Spirit of Christ, they don’t belong to him. ¹⁰ If Christ is in

you, the Spirit is your life because of God’s righteousness, but the body is dead because of sin. ¹¹ If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies also, through his Spirit that lives in you.

MESSAGE: “Sibling Rivalry”

You may be wondering why I decided to have us discuss stories from our Old Testament this summer. There are a couple of reasons. First, I think we should know about our ancestors and the founders of our faith. After all, we have all studied about George Washington to find out what he did. If it wasn’t for him and the other patriots, we’d be living under British rule and who knows what our churches would look like.

The other reason I chose to visit these stories is to look for how we can learn from those who lived long ago. Are there similarities between how we live and how they lived? What were the consequences or outcomes of, what we might call mistakes, that those people made? And today’s story has some great examples.

Genesis 25:19-34 which we read this morning continues the Abraham story through his offspring, now his grandson Jacob and all his relationships which begins the “generations” of Isaac. Though historically referred to as “the Jacob cycle,” Genesis 25-36 provides readers with the complicated story of a number of family members – ambition, deceit, sorrow, death, birth, and encounters with the divine, love, and animosity. I think we can relate to that. The ancestral tales are important for those who follow them the know, in the colloquialism of the U.S. Deep

South, “who their people are.” Family matters now and in the ancient Israelite world. And, in this case, family continues the promise God made to Abraham.

We read about Rebekah’s pregnancy, the birth of Esau and Jacob, the conflict between the boys, and how Jacob got Esau’s birthright fulfilling the message Rebekah received when she complained about her difficult pregnancy; “the older will serve the younger.” Esau was the older but since he lost his birthright, he will serve his younger brother Jacob.

The message we can learn from how this happened comes down to gratification. Esau was not thinking about “delayed gratification” when he came home hungry; he wanted “instant gratification” from a bowl of stew. Here is one of those points I mentioned earlier, a point to consider about human behavior and what we do when we don’t think beyond our desires in the moment. Let’s just stop a minute and think about how we live with instant gratification. Pain killers with “instant relief.” Instant rice, instant oatmeal, microwave meals that are faster than oven cooked food. Drive-thru banks. Drive-thru pharmacies. Drive-thru fast food. Home delivery of almost anything. It’s great until we see the bill with delivery charges.

We’re always in a hurry. Why? Are we in a hurry to get home, put our feet up and watch television using the remote, of course? Then our doctor tells us we are getting out of shape because of sitting too much. We have high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, kidney disease, conditions caused by stress because we’re always in a hurry. So you see where I’m going here; instant gratification can cause lasting consequences. It will be years before the

implications of Jacob’s actions bear fruit, but he knew the value of the birthright.

It would be easy to demonize either Jacob or Esau, but what they are is complicated men in a lineage God has decided for God’s own reasons to bless. Jacob is neither vil nor perfectly virtuous. He is human. So is Esau. This observation does not excuse them; but it does reflect on the ways God’s work gets done through ordinary people. Esau, like Ishmael before him, would also amass great wealth and become a leader of nations.

There is plenty in these stories to ponder about the ways God leads, provides, and grants blessings in our lives. What do you think? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

God of the past and God of the future, we are people in a hurry, but we don’t realize the consequences of speeding through life. We miss the beauty of your creation. We miss the joy of getting to know our neighbors. We miss time with you, dear God. Help us learn to stop “and smell the roses.”

Help us find the time to help others; those in pain, those who are lonely, those who are addicted, those in poverty, those who are hungry, those who have lost their homes or their family members because of tornadoes or storms, those who are in danger’s way, those who are grieving the loss of their loved ones due to violence in our backyards, those with mental illnesses, and the list goes on. So many people. So many lost people. And so many of us who don’t know how to help them. Be with us, Lord, and show us the way.

Thank you for sending us your Son who taught us to pray . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 769 "Hear Our Prayer"

**Hear our prayer, O God, hear our prayer, O God;
Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

We submit that all things came into being through The Word. All our gifts, resources, and blessings come from the Generous God, our Creator. May we return a portion of these gifts in grateful generosity for the ministry of the kingdom.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

Holy One, we thank you for revealing yourself to us and through us with abundance and flourishing. Give us generous hearts. May our offerings offer a testimony honoring your provision and giving glory to your name. Receive these gifts and magnify them for the needs of your creation. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

Let us go from this time of word and worship to word and witness. May the moments, movement, and ministry of our lives reveal the God we know and love to a world we know

and love. May our voices echo the rhythm and message of good news to a world in need of encouragement, community, and hope. Go in peace...go as peace fortified and nurtured by The Word.

CONDOLENCES TO the family and friends of Nancy Smith whose visitation will be in our sanctuary Monday evening 4-8. Celebration of Life on Tuesday at 9:30 am in the sanctuary.