Genesis 25.19-34

**Who’s in this family and why are we paying attention to it? (Tricky relationships, Pattern)**

**TV** - Γένεσις (origins, source) בְּרֵאשִׁית (in beginning) – overall context of the mythos: two stories of beginnings in the book: (1) cosmos and earth in general from chaos: a world is made, the first man and his wife start human history, but their offspring don’t get along, and God intervenes to end this era , (2) a devastating flood, a new earth and its population and growth, and within that growth, several other beginnings, a restart with Noah and a covenant. In the third generation of new-world, Abraham receives a blessing and another covenant. Abraham’s sons, Isaac and Ishmael separate; Isaac marries Rebekah, and now we hear about their sons, Jacob and Esau.

**LB** – Right about here is when people start to tune out… Don’t tune out! Today’s story really does reflect on our current realities. It’s rooted in relationships. It’s about two people from the same family seeing something differently. It’s about broken promises, a power struggle, and deep misunderstandings that have implications for generations. This couldn’t be more real. The number of conversations I’ve had in the past week with people from our congregation related to “How do I talk with X relative about Y?” or “My [insert family member] doesn’t listen to me when I talk about [insert topic], but I just can’t deal with their [insert opinion].” Truly, this has been a huge source of pastoral care in our community just this week, making this passage even more relevant that we might have expected!

**TV** - Side note: stories of family relationships (genealogy) and structures make for boring reading today, but were important to pre-literate societies as a memory tool as well as to tell of one’s place among all of the world’s families—being unique yet part of a whole, which leads to

Pattern: these stories of family structures, relationships and experience tell of conflict arising, from which a rivalry drives a reaction, with a first response that is harmful, then reconciliation and working out a path to survival.

**LB** – Let’s highlight that! The pattern is: conflict, rivalry, reaction, harmful response, reconciliation, survival.

Not thriving… survival. There’s a difference. Think about how you see this in today’s world. How are we surviving and not thriving. What would we need to thrive?

**What’s the problem? (False dichotomies)**

**TV** – we are divided in so many ways—even something as simple as a mask -- what we don’t need is “false dichotomies”. Background: false dichotomy is a frequent logical flaw, as well as one often exploited by some who should know better. But it’s effective, creating a sense of limited choice (may I add—done by those who seek to put God in a box) that leads us to not work together.

Working together fits the larger story: conflict in these stories generally emerges with competition for position in the family. In this case, it’s who will become the primary heir. Why does it matter? I’m reminded of a student who wrote of Genesis 29 that the story of Jacob marrying both Rachel and Leah was a sly commentary that polygamy didn’t work (perhaps he read Mark Twain’s comments on polygamy in Utah in *Roughing It*) – which brings up the hermeneutic of suspicion: the Bible tells me so, but how do we take it? Does it affirm the situation or critique it? In this case, is the writer offering a critique of the rigidity of patriarchal structures (Hiebert) and offering a way to bring them down (Niebuhr)?

**LB** – and let’s go a bit deeper into Verse 22. I love when Rebecca asks, "If this is the way it is to be, why go on living?" I think a LOT of people say that... especially people with a lot of privilege. What can we do to combat some of this? AND/OR – what if that phrase doesn’t mean what we think it means?

**TV**: I struggle with this -- the text here is very unclear. (1) Did she have a premonition of the struggle and rivalry to come? (2) is it an idiom, and we longer know what it’s about. Also note that Rebekah goes directly to Yahweh, no intermediary, priest, male, etc. (3) recall that oracle replies are often quizzical.

**What’s in a Name?**

**LB**: Verse 26 Popular interpretation says that "Jacob" means "heel-grabber". Hebrew may have originally meant "May God Protect". The Inclusive Bible then says, "Heel-Grabber" implies deceit - someone who intentionally trips others. Jacob fulfills the Trickster archetype much the way Coyote does in Native American stories. Indeed, the Trickster is a prevalent theme in Genesis and throughout Jewish literature. Often it is both an expression of the Jewish sense of humor and an adaptive response of a persecuted people." FASCINATING, to me. Does the Trickster imagery do anything for you?

**TV**: “Esau” is a pun on “hair” (but no relation to heir, which would have been fun); “Jacob” is a pun on “heel”—and I wonder if this would parallel the English use of heel as a person of disrepute. Also fascinated by the Trickster, which is a frequent theme in mythology. I am still pondering this…in the light of the parent’s differences:

Isaac chooses Esau but Rebekah promotes Jacob, creating double subversion: a woman in patriarchal society, and a younger brother with no right to inheritance. Subversion is the only path available in this culture to the disadvantaged, and in ch 26 we are offered an imaginative path: a sort of exile to resolve the conflict, and the two live in peace and are rewarded generously.

**LB** – Return to the art that was a part of the devotional booklet and a part of the scripture reading today: “Gold dances along the boundary between Jacob and Esau, representing how God will work through their discord to create more diversity among the nations.” (Lisle Gwynn Garrity, *Sanctified Art Summer Study Journal*, 20). Boundaries are liminal places.

**What do we take from here? (liminality)**

**LB** – So we are coming to a close of this adventure, but the story isn’t over… not even close. I wonder what lesson you will take with you? There are plenty from which to choose.

**TV** – (a) lesson of these stories in Genesis is that in a liminal place, we should react to discord by embracing diversity and outreach. Grasping for position and imposing one’s own norms on another has resulted in terrible damage to the world in the past (Theodore Hiebert, *The beginning of difference: discovering identity in God's diverse world*, xii-xii, 73-94, 150) and as we face a similar situation today, we would do well to heed this often misquoted warning: “Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." (George Santayana, *Reason in Common Sense*, 1905)—difference can destroy or create; Jacob and Esau teach us how to push beyond.

People are complex. There is no single story line of history (Tuchmann, *The Proud Tower*) and there are always multiple points of view. Simple dichotomies are almost always false, and lead to ignoring the complexity and multiple points of a story.

One of the tragedies of some movements today is that the Bible has become dichotomous rule book. Peter Enns, in How the Bible Actually Works (HarperOne, 2019) (<http://flyingkittymonster.blogspot.com/2019/11/the-bible-book-of-wisdom-and-disability.html>): the Bible is ancient, ambiguous, and diverse. It doesn’t provide us with “facts” to download, but an invitation to a quest to know God, our world, and our place – it invites us to explore –

**LB** – We are living in a liminal season. There are not two choices (mask or no mask, Republican or Democrat, Life or Choice, School or No School, Black or White). NO. There is room for conversation and exploration and mistake-making and question asking. If only we would do so…