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Genesis 25:19-34
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Brotherly Strife

Good Morning Church Family,

Genesis's family story is a fascinating one. Genesis is full of dramatic stories, Three stories of men naming their wives as sisters because they feared powerful men, aborted child sacrifice, murdering an entire town in retribution for rape, a prostitute more righteous than Judah, and five sibling rivalries. Today's sibling rivalry is in the middle, Jacob and Esau.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts together be pleasing to you. Lord of the Fathers, laughter, Supplanters, and wrestlers. Amen.

During the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." Indeed, conflict with people close to us is a part of life. It is normal. And here in Genesis are five stories of sibling rivalry. First, Cain and Abel are the first mention of sin in the Bible. Second, Isaac and Ishmael is more a conflict between their mothers. Third, Jacob and Esau, which we will study today. Forth, Leah and Rachel fight over their husband's (singular) love. And finally, Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery over a father's gift, but by the end of the story, they fully reconcile and live together as brothers.

These stories are remarkably similar because each conflict is rooted in favoritism. Then we are told that their parents each favored one child.

Isaac loved Esau because he was fond of game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

I think today's bulletin cover art shows it wonderfully. You see tall Esau with a rabbit, and on the other side are Jacob and Rebekah, with Jacob making the same hand gesture as their mother. This art blurs with chapter 27 when Rebekah instructs Jacob on how to steal his brother's blessing. I hope this lesson is nothing new to you all here. I grew up with my parents insisting they did not play favorites with my brother and me. Still I want to recognize how this is hard. Every child will have different needs, maybe one will need more help than others. Maybe you're lucky enough to live close to some or all of your kids. I hope we can all see how it is hard for everything to be fair even if you hold no favoritism in your heart. Today's scripture asks us to pay attention.

But the struggle does not end there, Jacob and Esau struggle in the womb. We are given an uncomfortable image,

The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?"

Indeed Jacob and Esau will struggle together, struggling to be firstborn. Jacob gripping Esau's heel, Jacob will struggle for Esau's birthright and blessing from Isaac. Jacob's name means supplanter, and indeed he will supplant his brother and become Isreal. Embedded in this image is God's explanation.

*“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.”*

Here I want to take a step back and recognize that this story is not merely an account of two people but also Isreal reckoning with their interrelatedness to the surrounding nations. Lot's daughters become the Moabites and Ammonites, the neighboring nations east of Isreal. Ismaeal's descendants are in Arabia, and Esau's descendants are the Edomites to the south. The lesson here is that Isreal's neighbors are relatives and rivals.

What are we to make of this story? It reminds me of how difficult and necessary the work of peacemaking is. In our families, communities, and world. The Invasion of Ukraine is described as a fratricide, two nations that were once interconnected in the USSR are now at war. In our own country, we are much more divided than we've been for decades. I am not here to judge, only to point to a text that shows how favoritism and seeking to be the firstborn breaks relationships. Instead, Jesus calls us to make peace with our brother or sister. First, we must make our human relationships right before approaching God. Right relationship is when we can see the divine image in each and every one of us. There can be no insiders and outsiders, no blessed and outcast, but all are one in Christ Jesus. Amen.