

**Summer Worship Series: “Beginnings”  
Twins**

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
13 July 2014—Sermon Text: Genesis 25:19-34  
FUMC Arlington, Texas 76011

[An example is] . . . more forcible than precept.  
People look at my six days in the week  
to see what I mean on the seventh—( Robert Cecil).  
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Hear the day’s lesson:

19 These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham’s son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. 21 Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. 22 The children struggled together within her; and she said, “If it is to be this way, why do I live?” So she went to inquire of the Lord. 23 And the Lord said to her,

“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.”

24 When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. 25 The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. 27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. 30 Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!” (Therefore he was called Edom.) 31 Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” 32 Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” 33 Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright (Genesis 25:19-34).

This text reverses much that human culture regards as an orderly method of succession. We take our questions and cues from Jason Byassee who helps us navigate through a series of odd details that emerge from this story. What is in play here is the law of primogeniture— a code of rank or right

whereby siblings are ordered according to age, with the eldest first. In fact it is a principle of inheritance.

Our story is an odd one in that it tells us about twin brothers, one chosen, the other not. How exactly are we to understand these parents, Isaac and Rebekah, who divide their love, one loves one twin; the other the other? What does the story mean to tell us exactly? As we know, this passage flies in the face of the economics and social structure of primogeniture where the elder gets the lion's share and the rest get scraps. Yet why this should be so with Israel? Why does God choose a heel-grabber, a tent-dweller, a bargainer for birthright—Jacob, not Esau? Genesis does not say. God does not say. It is simply announced (*Feasting on the Word—Year A*).

There is a great mystery exposed here—that is Rebekah's preference for Jacob. As God elects Israel, no one tells us why Rebekah loves this son more than his elder brother (older by a few moments). Jacob hardly seems lovable. What people or nation tells founding stories about itself like Israel's? Remember the flaws of Israel's greatest king—David? One would rather expect Esau to father a heroic people, slayer of game, firstborn, red and handsome. No, Jacob the tent-dweller and snake-oil salesman takes her heart. If Rebekah is an image of the church, as the Early Church Fathers suggest, she is a glorious one. Rebekah loves the cheat. Maybe just so there is hope for the rest of us.

We might meditate as well on Esau, the hairy man, wiping lentils from his beard, belly full but birthright empty. He gave up everything for this meal. Perhaps he is an image for us, too (*Feasting on the Word—Year A, After Pentecost 1*). Maybe God chose Jacob before he was born to remind us of what Paul writes 1200 years later:



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arlington**methodist**.org

26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

**David Mosser, FUMC of Arlington, TX 76011**