

Christ Church New Southgate & Friern Barnet

16 July 2023

Song: E ti tobi (how great)

Song: This is amazing grace

Prayer

Song: One day for the Lord

Reading: Genesis 25. 19-34

¹⁹This is the story of Abraham's son Isaac. ²⁰Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel (an Aramean from Mesopotamia) and sister of Laban. ²¹Because Rebecca had no children, Isaac prayed to the Lord for her. The Lord answered his prayer, and Rebecca became pregnant. ²²She was going to have twins, and before they were born, they struggled against each other in her womb. She said, "Why should something like this happen to me?" So she went to ask the Lord for an answer.

²³The Lord said to her,

"Two nations are within you; You will give birth to two rival peoples. One will be stronger than the other; The older will serve the younger."

²⁴The time came for her to give birth, and she had twin sons. ²⁵The first one was reddish, and his skin was like a hairy robe, so he was named Esau. ²⁶The second one was born holding on tightly to the heel of Esau, so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

²⁷The boys grew up, and Esau became a skilled hunter, a man who loved the outdoors, but Jacob was a quiet man who stayed at home. ²⁸Isaac preferred Esau, because he enjoyed eating the animals Esau killed, but Rebecca preferred Jacob.

²⁹One day while Jacob was cooking some bean soup, Esau came in from hunting. He was hungry ³⁰and

said to Jacob, "I'm starving; give me some of that red stuff." (That is why he was named Edom.)

³¹Jacob answered, "I will give it to you if you give me your rights as the first-born son."

³²Esau said, "All right! I am about to die; what good will my rights do me?"

³³Jacob answered, "First make a vow that you will give me your rights."

Esau made the vow and gave his rights to Jacob. ³⁴Then Jacob gave him some bread and some of the soup. He ate and drank and then got up and left. That was all Esau cared about his rights as the first-born son.

All age prayer

Song: Speak O Lord

Sermon: God of the gut and grace

As soon as a woman becomes pregnant – two things become clear: your body is no longer your own and everyone, and I mean everyone, has an opinion about it. When I was pregnant with our first, without my permission I had my belly rubbed for good luck – like I was Aladdin's lamp. I had other women dangle necklaces in front of my tummy, if it swings north south it's a boy and east west it's a girl. They were wrong. Even an intelligent person will consider every folk story, myth and random theory about what is going on inside a woman when she is pregnant. Why? I guess it's because there is a hidden activity of God that can be seen in part and not fully understood.

I have enormous sympathy with Rebecca's troubled pregnancy. As a baby gets larger, when they move and you can watch your whole belly lurch from left to right, it is not only uncomfortable but can be quite distressing. And with two surely the sensations of movement are only more exaggerated. Rebecca did not have google to endlessly scroll through.

However, from other ancient texts from her country Mesopotamia, there were all sorts of divination methods which I'm sure the local women and men would have recommended to her: hepatoscopy was a favourite, this is where a goat is killed, and the liver checked – if the liver is x shaped then the answer is y. It's a bit like picking petals off a daisy – loves me, loves me not. Or lecanomancy - the answer is found from the shape of oil poured onto water, sounds like reading tea leaves to me. Or shooting arrows,

throwing dice, interpreting dreams all of these things were methods to try and work out why something was happening. And of course, we are no different, are we? If there is something happening in our lives that we don't understand we will google it, we will ask friends, we might check our horoscope, or even swing a necklace around a pregnant woman.

But Rebecca has more sense. She knows something is wrong in her belly, she can feel it. Yet she goes to the one person who can help, she goes to the Lord in prayer. How often do we know something is wrong, but don't ask the Lord about it? Rebecca shows us the way, her body and her intuition is a source of knowledge to her. From her body she knows something is not right, but it is the Lord who interprets the situation for her.

And what a prophecy to hear for a first-time mother. It took over 1000 years for the descendants of Esau to be ruled by the descendants of Jacob, but it happened. God is at work in her life, he has brought her this pregnancy after 20 years of marriage and he is now guiding her through prayer. When we are troubled, when we just know something is wrong – this knowledge is important. I'll add here – if there is something wrong in your body, see a doctor. Don't delay. But also take it to the Lord in prayer, and he will lead you into truth.

The contrast of Esau's gut feeling to Rebecca's couldn't be worse. His tummy rules his head. Esau is so hungry he can't even remember the words for whatever Jacob is cooking, he calls it stuff – that red stuff, give it to me. Apparently, Esau is a man at this point, but I can hear a grumpy kid in his voice, can't you? I'm going to die, if I don't have a chocolate bar now. I'm literally starving! Esau lets his hunger dominate his thoughts so much he gives his privilege as first son away for a bowl of soup.

Rebecca's boys were not identical twins, the first born Esau was red and hairy. He was a hunter whose meat was the favourite of his dad's. Esau is jock, an alpha male, with raw strength. Today - he would have been captain of the first fifteen, competed in 24hr sporting events, and only eaten beef burgers. He might have been called a man's man. Our concepts of gender are changing, strong men can also knit, strong men stay home and help their mothers, but in the days of the bible gender was more fixed.

Outside the home was the male domain, men were celebrated for being hunter gatherers. Inside the home was the female domain. This is where we find Jacob, offering some sort of pottage, stew, soup that might make Gordon Ramsey proud, food that smelt

so good that a brother would give away his right to inheritance. In those days the first born got the lot – money, land, power and the second – was literally a spare. Jacob is seen as weaker, less powerful, closer to his mother than his father. A mummy's boy. Again, today we think about gender in different ways, a man at home cooking soup is not weaker or necessarily seen as soft for loving his mother.

What's interesting about these two brothers is that God sides with the weaker. The prophecy recognises the younger as a ruler not the older. Indeed, Jacob goes onto have a family of 12 each are the head of the 12 tribes of Israel, one of whom is David – to be King David, the most celebrated king in the history of the bible, and from his family line of course, we reach Mary and Joseph and Jesus himself. What does all this tell us about God? It's a reminder of his preference for justice for the weak, poor, bereaved, lost, the least. It's a picture of how privilege is turned upside down in the kingdom of God. It's a reminder of his grace.

Paul writes about it in 1 Corinthians 1

27 God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful. 28 He chose what the world looks down on and despises and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important.

The giving of a birth right for a bowl of soup is a scandal, a scandal of God's grace. We see in this story the hidden will of God, to lift up and bless the weak, for in the Lord's eyes 'weak' is not a negative, it's entry for the kingdom of God.

Song: How delightful is your dwelling

Communion

Prayers for the world

Loving God, For our world we pray, that humanity will learn to treat it with care and respect so that it may nourish and flourish not just present generations but future ones too. May we treasure creation and not abuse and destroy. May we live for the future and not just the present.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For justice and integrity, respect and care for all peoples we pray. For those who are exploited, trafficked, unjustly and wrongly imprisoned.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For families who live on the breadline, for those who struggle to manage life's challenges. May they encounter people who will care for them, who will support, encourage, guide and provide for their needs so that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that there is hope that goodness and stability can grow and flourish.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For the war-torn countries, nations, peoples of the world who live among bombs and landmines and sniper fire and so much more. For those whose lives are senselessly pulled apart, fractured and fragmented. For those whose homes are wiped out, whose homelands are no more, whose journey seems bleak, whose families are shattered.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For our health services, home carers, social workers. Those who seek to care and heal despite all the pressures that society places on them, that they may be supported themselves, financially and professionally so that, as they seek to heal others' wounds and support their needs, they are not themselves being wounded or harmed or finding themselves worn to a frazzle.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For those who are blind to the world's needs, may their eyes be opened. For those who are deaf to the cries of humanity may they have their ears unstopped. For those who live in splendid isolation from the realities of life may they be enabled to see and hear what is needed.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For our families and those near to us who have barren lives or lives filled with trauma, pain and anguish. May we sow seeds of love and care that they may flourish and be supported in their living. May we help make their journey easier and safer.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For these and all those in need, we offer our prayers.
Amen.

Song: The Kingdom is yours.

Blessing