

Holy Tricksters
 Jacob and Esau
 Genesis 25: 19-34
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May the God who creates us...

Good Morning!

Jacob and Esau, Esau and Jacob, Rebekah and Isaac's twin sons, we are back in Genesis. Here are the stories, myths and legends of how it all began. Buckle-up, settle in we are off on another tour of humanity, some 4000 years ago and yet and still so many things have not changed. Siblings still rival, sorting their way in the world, in connection to their parents and how it is that they hear and heed God's call. And what it all may mean for us.

When we were last together, we spent some time exploring Abraham's notion that God may have called him to sacrifice Isaac, his only son. In that piece it seemed as if a case could be made that Isaac, never really recovered from a near encounter with a knife held in his father's hand.

He was a boy then, in today's passage, some 50 plus years have passed. He has been married to his wife Rebekah for twenty years and they have yet to have any children. After 20 years of patiently, waiting, Isaac finally prays to God and asks for children. God quickly answers his prayer and Rebekah becomes pregnant.

She is not young, and it is not an easy pregnancy, in fact she is rocked by what feels like violence in her womb. She calls to God and says, "If this is what its like, why did it happen to me?"

And the Lord says to her, "Two nations are in your womb; two different people will emerge from your body. One people will be stronger than the other; the older will serve the younger."

Sure enough—when she gives birth—she has twins.

The first child comes out— very hairy—red hair to be exact and the second boy follows right on his big brother's heel, literally the younger one is hanging onto his big brother's foot. It's almost as if he is trying to pull his brother back from the brink of the birth canal, so that he can explode into the world first. But he loses that contest. The boys grow.

Esau is the older, Jacob the younger. Esau revels in the outdoors, hunting and trapping to his father's great delight. While Jacob stays home, spending quality time in the tents with his beloved mother.

The stage is set.

One day Esau comes in from hunting in the fields famished. He finds Jacob boiling a pot of lentil stew. He says to Jacob, "Give me some of that red stuff that you're cooking." To which Jacob says, "Absolutely, bring your bowl on over and---- sell me your birthright."

"You want my birthright, for a bowl of stew?"

Well not that it matters all that much, I'm going die of hunger without food, [so] what good is a birthright if I'm dead?!"

"Give me your word," says Jacob as he holds the ladle over the bubbling pot. Esau readily promises away a lifetime of rights and privileges to satiate his stomach just one time.

Life goes on, Isaac's eyes grow dim, his spirit is weak and he calls to his oldest son, Esau, and tells him to take his bow and go to the fields and hunt some game. Then come back he says and make me some delicious food, then I will bless you before I die.

Esau goes and does as his father Isaac asks.

Meanwhile Rebekah, Isaac's wife, who loves her son Jacob oh so very much, and who has heard God's words, she leaves nothing up to chance, fate or the Holy Spirit. Instead she calls Jacob and tells him to go get some goats and she will prepare them and make a luscious stew that will touch Isaac's soul. "Then you my son, will bring the food to Isaac and ask for his blessing, tell him that you are Esau."

"But he is hairy and my skin is smooth,"

Never mind that, says his mother, you will wear his clothes and put the skins from the goats on your arms and your father will not know the difference."

So Jacob does as his mother asks. And then Rebekah prepares a stew, and Jacob the younger, dresses in his brother's clothes, wears the skin of the goats on his arm and neck and fools his father into giving him his blessing which doubles his inheritance.

Just after Isaac blesses, Jacob steals away through the side, and Esau enters through the front. Only to learn that his father is full and his father's blessing, his father's special blessing has now gone the way of his birthright: both are wrapped around Jacob.

But no doubt you are saying mildly intriguing, yes, but what does it have to do with us?

Biblical Theologian, Miguel De La Torre, has an interesting take on Jacob's and Rebekah's interactions with Esau and Isaac, writing very provocatively on the role of tricksters in scripture, "Tricksters, he writes,

"Are usually portrayed as relying on their cunningness and deception to exploit the greed, weakness, or false sense of self-righteousness possessed by those who are dominant within society....Tricksters usually undo the established order, designed to benefit those who hold power," (Genesis: Belief a Theological Commentary on the Bible p 256).

Dr. De La Torre's point, is that God uses Tricksters in scripture as a way to bring about transformation and change. For example: The prophet Nathan, tells a story that tricks King David into admitting his wrong with Bathsheba. Thus pointing out the injustice of a powerful ruler who just takes whoever and whatever he wants with nary a notice of his people's loss and despair.

Or Joseph of the Technicolor dream coat, who hides his identity from his brothers, to see if they are sorry for what they did to him. In the process he makes clear the injustice of attempted murder and selling someone into slavery

Then there is Naomi who teaches Ruth how to get Boaz's attention so that he might consider marrying her—righting the injustice of destitute immigrants with no welcome and little care.

The list goes on and on...

As De La Torre says, the Trickster may use some deceit, but only to reveal a deeper truth obscured by the ways of the world.

Jacob and Rebekah ensure that the patriarch of Israel is not a man who will causally sell his birthright for a bowl of lentils, of such a man great nations are not made. Tricksters righting wrongs.

My friends, what injustices do we see roiling in our world?
How might we using the gifts God has given us, how might we be wise as serpents, innocent as doves, how might we be holy tricksters as of old who will not let injustices rule our world.

This is what I believe is our work in the world. As it was then it is now.

Amen.