

Proper 11  
Year A 2017  
July 23, 2017  
Genesis 28:10-19a  
Romans 8:12-25  
Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

We begin today's lessons with the saga of Jacob and Esau.

These are the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah.

If you are not familiar with the story,  
Rebekah's favorite is Jacob, the second born son.

Last week we heard that  
Jacob came up with a scheme  
and stole his brother Esau's birthright.

For reasons that are not clear to me,  
the lectionary committee  
decided to skip a very important part of the story  
of Jacob and Esau by jumping ahead  
two and a half chapters to this week's lesson.

So let me give you a Cliff Notes version.

I realize I am dating myself by using the term Cliff Notes.

For those unfamiliar with Cliff Notes  
this is the equivalent of the Wikipedia version.

After stealing Esau's birthright from his brother, Jacob goes a step further in his conniving behavior. A big step further.

Now Jacob is not alone in this. Isaac, realizing his days are numbered, orders Esau to go hunt and prepare a meal for him so that Isaac may bless him before he dies.

Esau obediently leaves on his hunt.

Rebekah, having overheard Isaac's directive to Esau, quickly calls Jacob and relates the encounter to him.

She orders him to go and get two kid goats from the herd so that she may prepare them and Jacob may present them to his father, disguised as his brother, and receive the blessing intended for his brother Esau, the firstborn son.

Now, an important piece to this story is the physical difference between Esau and Jacob.

Esau is politely described as a hairy man.

So Jacob expresses his concern to his mother that his father will not be duped, even though blind, and will realize when he touches Jacob that his son is trying to deceive him.

But Rebekah will not be deterred,  
nor Jacob at the end of the day,  
so they conspire and come up with a plan  
to use the kid skins to cover Jacob's hands and arms  
and to dress him in some of Esau's clothes  
to further cement their deception of Isaac and Esau.

Rebekah prepares the meal,  
Jacob dons his hairy outfit and appears at Isaac's side  
with his offering to receive the blessing.

Isaac, however, states his confusion  
by questioning Jacob as to  
how he was able to so quickly hunt down game  
and why he is hearing Jacob's voice but feeling Esau's hands.

Jacob, not to be deterred,  
states that his successful hunt was due to God.

Isaac asks Jacob point blank,  
"Are you really my son Esau?"  
and Jacob assures his father that he is his firstborn son.

Isaac proceeds and blesses Jacob.

Jacob has barely left his father's bedside  
when Esau arrives with his prepared meal  
and appears before his father to receive his blessing.

It does not take long for the two of them  
to recognize the deceitful plot of Jacob.

Esau consoles himself with plans to murder Jacob  
as soon as Isaac dies and Jacob knows this.

Isaac then sends Jacob far away  
to his brother in law to find a wife  
and to keep him safe from Esau.

That brings us to today's lesson.

I'm telling you,  
Dateline and 20/20 have nothing  
to compare to this family drama.

So now Jacob leaves his family,  
on his father's orders,  
in search of a wife and to escape his brother's wrath.

His first night he finds a place to rest  
and falls into a deep sleep  
filled with dreams of angels  
ascending and descending a ladder  
between heaven and earth.

And then the Lord God of his grandfather Abraham  
and father Isaac appears to Jacob  
in his dream promising to give Jacob land and  
offspring enough to spread out in all directions.

The Lord God in his dream also tells him that  
all the families of the earth  
shall be blessed in Jacob and his offspring.

The dream continues with the Lord God promising Jacob that God will be with him wherever he goes and will bring him back to this land.

God promises to be with Jacob until God has done what has been promised to Jacob.

Jacob awakes afraid, no doubt, given the circumstances, declares the spot where he has experienced the presence of God as Bethel, meaning the house of God.

Jacob marks it as holy with a pillar.

Jacob's hope in God and in this piece of land which would help to fulfill God's promise to Jacob is evident in Jacob's actions subsequent to this encounter with the Holy One.

The Hebrew scriptures tell us that this site was heavily used by those seeking God.

We hear that in troublesome times the people went to Bethel to ask counsel of God.  
(Judges 20:18 Judges 20:31 ; 21:2 ).

That the ark of the covenant was kept at this site for a long time under the care of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron.  
(20:26-28 ).

Here also Samuel held the rotation his court of justice.  
([1 Samuel 7:16](#) ).

Clearly, it becomes a site  
where those who hold out hope  
for the Kingdom of God  
prayed and worshipped  
seeking that which had not yet been realized.

Many, many years later,  
Paul writes to the community in Rome  
about the Spirit working through the children of God  
to bring about the creation hoped for but not yet seen.

Indeed, Paul states:

“We know that the whole creation  
has been groaning in labor pains until now;  
and not only the creation, but we ourselves....”

For it is through the children of God,  
all humanity,  
that the new creation hoped for,  
already begun, but not yet fully realized  
will be brought to fruition.

Like Jacob and Paul,  
we are called to continue to bring to fulfillment  
the vision to which we believe  
the community of St. Andrews has been uniquely called by God.

To offer sanctuary in the City.

To grow in God's love.

To seek renewal of the world.

The other night I was leaving the Parish House  
walking to my car  
when I ran into one of my friends  
who uses the Rose Garden as a safe place to sleep,  
to seek comfort and community.

I met this individual through the work we are engaged in  
related to the Tiny House Village.

He and some friends were winding down  
and when I greeted him  
he said to me how wonderful it was  
to hear the singing coming from the church.

Tim was here with a group,  
maybe St. Martin's,  
and some of the windows were open  
so the folks taking comfort in the garden could hear the singing.

He said it sounded like angels  
and made him feel safe as he settled in for the night.

We hope for that which is not seen.

We hope for that which is better than that which we can see.

We hope for safe, secure shelter  
for all the members of the Denver community.

And maybe for angels to sing them into peaceful slumber.

We seek the renewal of the world  
by offering a safe place for those who are weary  
or heavy laden to be able to let go of all that is burdening them.

We do this through our hospitality, our music,  
Tiny Homes, community, feeding the hungry, worship,  
safe permanent supportive housing,  
and the many other ministries we are engaged in.

We seek to offer a safe place  
where children and youth can form community,  
can explore in safety that which needs to be explored,  
where there is no judgment or condemnation  
in the pursuit of knowledge or understanding.

We hope for that which is not yet seen.

Like Jacob and many subsequent generations,  
we come to this place  
marked as a House of God for generations,  
in troublesome times such as these to seek the counsel of God.

We come to hear, read, mark, learn,  
and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures.

We come to this place to seek justice  
as a community that hopes for the Kingdom not yet realized  
where all have what they need  
to live into the lives they have been created for.

We work with patience but not complacency.

We work with a patience that acknowledges  
the enormity of change needed  
but we work with an energy  
that shows forth the imperative need for change.

We join together each week,  
as a community,  
around this table  
in remembrance of the One who  
showed forth during his lifetime  
the Kingdom that has yet to be fulfilled.

We come in hope for that which is not yet seen.