

# Sermon Text For January 24, 2016

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I Corinthians 1:16-21, Genesis 25:19-26

## **Conflict from within and without**

It has been over 2 months since we last were in Genesis. It might take a little catching up in order to remember where we left off. We left off with a Starbucks cup and asked the question, why don't people believe us? We were in Scripture where the servant of Abraham found a wife for Isaac, and it was Rebekah. We stated how compelling Abraham in his service to his God which allowed his servant to believe and trust in the Lord just because of his example.

So now today we move from Isaac and Rebekah discovering each other, to Rebekah being pregnant which she finds out will spark a conflict from both within her during her pregnancy, literally, to a conflict without between the two nations that are formed out of Esau and Jacob.

I wanted to share with you an old church joke that somehow fits into today's theme. You can choose any denomination that you want. A man was shipwrecked on an island and had lived there for 10 years before he was discovered. The man who discovered him was shown around his island. It was actually quite small but the man had built three huts side by side. Let me tell you what they are, said the found man proudly. The first is my house and then with a proud smile he said the third one is my church. The visitor was puzzled about the second hut so he asked the man about it, and the man looked over at him and whispered that's the church I used to go to.

Welcome back to Genesis and I hope you remember that all that we believe is really wrapped up in the first book of the Bible. Conflict is also a real part of Scripture as real as it is in our lives. Today we get to see in Scripture the birth of the children of Isaac and Rebekah. From conception, even before they are born, we see that there is conflict. We are finished with Abraham and now we are going to leave him behind and pick up the stories of Isaac, and Jacob and we will end it with Joseph.

From within the womb there is conflict and then from without, in the world once they are born there is conflict as well. Today we will try to learn how to coexist peaceably with all, we will learn that Christ's presence in our lives demands that we let go of the heel, the conflict that so often wants to hang on to and make itself a part of our life.

As we look at conflict today we see that the conflict which we are discussing today is found specifically in children. It never ceases to amaze me how historically conflict has been propitiated by siblings, one brother against another. Think about your own families and if there is conflict how that has played itself out in a meaningful way. For some reason with 4 boys in my family there never has been conflict, I can't identify why that is not the case in some families. Today we find today the origin of the conflict in Palestine, the war and the hatred between the Palestinian Arabs and the Palestinian Jews.

Remember Ishmael Abraham's other son through Hagar Sarah's slave girl. He was kicked out of the camp because he was playing with Isaac, the son of Sarah. Ishmael is considered the father of the Arabic states while Isaac is considered the father of the Jewish state. The conflict in Genesis that we saw earlier in chapter 21 continues to this day in Palestine. Now while they were only half brothers, with the same father who was Abraham, it serves to help our story today when we see conflict in two other brothers born from the same father and mother.

The reason for this history lesson is to show how modern day Israel was born into conflict since Jacob or Israel fought with his brother Esau in the womb and then later, this Esau who became Edom and the father of other Arab states. From the beginning Jacob or Israel competes with his brothers for seniority, favoritism, even his father's and God's blessing. From even before the conception of the state Israel, or Jacob in the womb battled against those around him even his own brother.

The same is true today. It has been, and I am sorry to say that it probably will be until Christ comes back in his glory, brother against brother, Isaac against Ishmael, Jacob against Esau, that there will be peace in the region. This is not the only place in the world where we have brother fighting against brother. Brothers in Christ, such as Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. The list could go on with families of the same region such as the historical Mackenzies and the Jones fighting each other in the style of the Montagues and the Capulets immortalized by Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet.

But today, as snow peacefully snuggles us and gives us a sense of security and warmth, it is in this setting that an answer to the conflict from within and from without can come. We find an answer to the conflict in history and in Scripture.

The church has been called by Paul the bride of Christ or even more appropriately the mother of all believers. This church can be seen as the womb of the world giving birth to those like us who are equipped and encouraged to teach the children well, so that they will as Micah states beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks, and that they will not learn war no more. Children, these youth are not born with a propensity to violence, they are not born knowing how to pull a trigger or hate people different than they are. They have to learn that. Unfortunately, we as adults make very good teachers in the good and the bad.

Now Jacob and Esau, well that is a different story. They were born with that conflict from the womb to birth. This is what I call the conflict from within. The fact that within their very own family there was such tremendous conflict, what they call today dysfunction, which is a fancy word which really means broken down, like a car that doesn't work, there was so much conflict from within their family that they really had the odds against them to become loving and God fearing youths. In the same way we know that we are responsible for our children and our youth here. Somebody might say, we are not responsible for the children of this church, their parents are, we are not responsible for the children in this community, their parents are. Every child that walks into this church becomes our responsibility and the parents become our responsibility as well.

You see children learn violence from us. Think of what you let them watch on TV or what you watch on TV. Our children learn war from us, think of what we encourage our children to think about other countries with comments that we might make. Our children learn hatred from us. Think of what we teach our children about other races and people who are different from us. Children learn conflict from us, their family. This is the conflict from within that we must avoid.

In our first Scripture Paul tells us that God takes those things of the world that are weak to teach us strength. God takes those things which are foolish to teach us wisdom. Paul also addressed the issue of conflict in I Corinthians. He said, the root of the conflict from within the church is that we take the sides of people. He tells us to avoid that by taking only the side of Christ. That is how you avoid conflict within the church. If something is conflictual then it means that one or both sides want their way and are not focused on the way of Christ.

These children grow up with conflict from within, such as Rebekah and Jacob taking sides, but they also grow up with conflict from without. Not only do they see it

within their own families but they see it also in the world around them. As these children find themselves in a world of conflict, we need to teach them and ourselves, as Paul states that we are to boast only in the Lord. We are to avoid conflict for all things save when Jesus Christ is at stake.

How do we deal with the conflict from within and without. How are we able to handle the raising of our children so that they will take only the good from us and the world and discard the bad. Let's look at the birth of Esau and Jacob. Today's Scripture marks the beginning of the story of Jacob. It is a story that we will follow for the next 12 chapters. Jacob was a heel of a man. His name means God protect and we see that he will need that protection. **But even before they are born and need God's protection we see that they are born of prayer.** Once again it seems that the promise has the potential of coming to an end because Isaac and Rebekah can not have children. Isaac prays for children and Rebekah conceives. The two twins, the first time that we read of twins in the Scripture, fight in her womb and she calls out in prayer to God. This is the first time that a woman prays to God and is responded to directly by God in Scripture as well. God gives her a vision, it must have been a private one because Isaac seems oblivious to Jacob's place in God's eyes. The children are born but only because their parents pray them into being through God's help.

In the midst of conflict from within the family and from without, in the world, our children are in need of prayer. Is there any doubt of this? Today we believe as did Isaac and Rebekah that the only way the children are going to make it is through God's guidance and support which we ask for in our prayers. The only way to avoid the family breaking, culture influencing conflict from within and without is to begin with prayer.

One of the children's favorite songs is He's got the whole world in his hands. We can sing that today only because in our prayer we acknowledge that God is protecting and in control of all that happens around our children. He's got the whole world in his hands... He's got our Sunday school in his hands, he's got our nursery in his hands, he's got our choir, in his hands, he's got our food bank, in his hands, he's got our dysfunctional families, in his hands, he's got the conflict from within and without, in his hands, he's got it all, in his hands. This is what we do when we pray is that we say that God has all those things that we pray for in his hands.

Let's make this church a refuge, a safe spot, a shelter, a haven where Jesus himself can come and say let the children come unto me and when they do come, and

they are coming and they will continue to come, we can gather them and protect them from conflict and surround them with Christ's love. Amen.