

Sermon Text for February 21, 2016

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Hebrews 12:1-3, Genesis 27:1-29

“Passing on the Blessings”

It was nice last week to get away from the conflict between Esau and Jacob and focus in upon their father who was in a constant struggle to keep his faith in the midst of a tug of war between the world and God. This week we find that a few years have passed and Isaac is once again a major player in our Scripture but the conflict between Esau and Jacob is brought back again.

We find Isaac blind and his primary emphasis has gone beyond maintaining his faith to trying to pass this faith on in a form of a blessing so that his future generations, Esau and Jacob in particular, will be able to live up to the responsibility of being people of God. His main concern is to pass the torch on to the next generation so that they can live out the promises that were given to his father Abraham.

Do you remember the Olympics in Atlanta? That was way back in 1996, we were missionaries in Italy. Besides the bombing what I will never forget was the scene of a very aging, very frail, Mohammed Ali taking the torch to light the Olympic eternal flame. There was something about that scene that for me invoked thoughts of the ancient games being passed on from generation to generation and finally here is a man who in his prime was the foremost athlete of his day and now age has taken a toll on him as it will on all of us. And he lights the flame signifying that the promises, the games must go on. It must have been 3 in the morning and tears were streaming down my cheeks as I watched him take that torch praying that he wouldn't fall. There is something about passing the torch from one generation to another regardless what situation it is that really gets me.

Today we will see how in Genesis 27 the faith and the blessing of God are passed down from one generation to the next in spite of our human attempts to force God's hand and to step out of what would be considered God's will. In spite of our human frailties the faith must be passed on.

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Video

I was introduced to this Scripture by the vision casting team that meets on Wednesday mornings. I cringe every time I see it. I also think of this Scripture when I see it. The prize being given to the wrong person and all that it stands for. Except Miss Columbia didn't get to keep the prize, whereas Jacob does.

What happens in this Scripture is very simple. Isaac attempts to pass his blessing to Esau, the oldest son, but the tag team of Rebekah and Jacob get in the way of that happening. Now the blessing that a father passes on to the son is usually a bed-side occurrence where the father asks for God to provide the son all of the help and the advantages that he could have to be prosperous. This blessing was handed down from generation to generation and represented God's blessing upon them.

The words of the blessing as Isaac gives them to a disguised Jacob and not to the rightful Esau are true words of blessing. He is promised the "dew of heaven" which would be rainfall, "the fitness of the earth and grain and wine", which would be prosperous crops, "people will serve you", a definite sense of power. This was the intention of Isaac, that he be able to pass on the very important blessing to his son, Esau.

In comes Rebekah who is the only person in this 4 person entangled family feud, who understands and is privy to God's revelation that she received while pregnant with the twins. Look back at Genesis 25:22-23 We don't know why God promises the job to Jacob but he did and his mother Rebekah will make sure that the promise is followed through.

In this role she transforms from nurturer to conniver and schemer. She takes on the role of instigator to usurpation, remember Jacob's name means usurper. She eaves drops on a private conversation between father and son and decides that something had to be done because her favorite son was about to be left out and overlooked when the blessing was about to be given. We now begin to get an insight into how determined Rebekah is when Jacob objects and states: mom, I don't think that is a good idea, I mean what if he has a good day and is able to see well and I get caught. He will only curse me then and I'll be done. The mom answers assuredly, don't worry, whatever curse he gives to you will fall upon me.

The children's rhyme sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me, is not true. At times words are the most powerful weapon we possess. The

wrong words can bring down a kingdom and the right words can raise up empires. This was especially true of the blessing that was handed down from one generation to the next. It was all in the words, they meant everything.

I don't want the conflict between the two brothers to blind you to what Isaac ultimately hoped to achieve. It wasn't just to say some nice words to his son but rather pass on this blessing to the next generation. His mission was to pass on the words of promise that God had delivered to his father first and then given to him at the conflict of the wells which we saw last week and now this week he will pass them on to his son. It was of absolute importance to the people of Israel that the teachings be passed on from generation to generation. You find the Old Testament filled with exhortations that these laws are to be read aloud in the assembly from generation to generation.

Rebekah plays the part in this story as the one who almost ruins the whole generational passing on of the faith. She orders Jacob around to trick his father. She is the one who dresses him up, makes the food, gives him the words to say. Calvin states that she went beyond the limits of faith. But how often do we see that our errors are often matched with faith. Like Sarah before her who got Hagar to lie with Abraham because God needed a little help to fulfill his promise, so Rebekah deceives her husband in order for Jacob to fulfill the promises that God had given her. But don't let this scene, don't let Rebekah take you away from Isaac's primary mission as he understands the importance, the primacy of passing on the blessing.

The church as the great mother of us all, is responsible for passing on the blessing, the faith from one generation to the next. We are responsible to train leaders, we are responsible to make sure that our youth know what we mean when we say that Jesus Christ is my Savior and he has changed our lives. With Scout Sunday behind us and preschool Sunday ahead of us we find ourselves in a place where we are given opportunities to make an impact upon this community, upon families who maybe, just maybe, have not been exposed to the promises that we have in Scripture. That maybe, just maybe, this is the only place where they are able to see the generational promise lived out and so pass it on to their children.

What kind of a job are we doing in the church to pass on this promise, to pass on this faith, the blessing that we have been given by God? We are the ones who are

responsible for passing on the blessing, for handing down the faith from one generation to the next so that they can claim it as their own.

At our session meeting this past week we were introduced to the Orange concept which spoke about the family being the single most important influence on a child's life. The church's responsibility is to partner with the family so that the child is able to be influenced in a way that is positive. Two forces, the family and the church, working together and in tandem and side by side is always going to be much more powerful than two forces working separately. That's our responsibility. That is how the faith gets passed down over the generations.

What are we doing as a church and what are we doing as families to pass our faith on? This church has more opportunities to pass on the faith and to learn about the faith than most that I can think of. We have four adult Sunday School classes as well as all kids ages represented. We have a monthly mid-week program with all ages that again is Bible based and faith based as well as an adult class where we will cover the basics of what we believe in Revelation. We have an extraordinary youth group which is gathering kids from the entire community and beyond. We have opportunities to put our faith into action with a wide variety of social agencies of which we are an integral part.

Our mission is to pass the blessings on. When Calvin wrote about this passage he saw a direct link to the New Testament and how Isaac was intent on passing on the faith. He quoted Ambrose who said: "We in like manner hide under the precious purity of our first born brother Christ, so that we may be attested righteous before God's sight. That Isaac smelled the odor of garments perhaps means that we are justified not by works but by faith, since the weakness of the flesh is a hindrance to works, but the brightness of faith, which merits the pardon of sins, overshadows the error of deeds."

It is through our faith and God's grace in Jesus Christ that we are made righteous. Like Isaac let us pass this faith which gives life to those that go after us. Amen.