

Devotion for Week of September 25, 2022

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

We have been discussing various characters from the book of Genesis in Sunday School – and what characters they are. For September we looked at Abram, Jacob and Esau, Jacob and wrestling with “the man” at the Jabbok river, and Judah, Jacob’s fourth son. But Genesis is full of all kinds of characters – I’ve always called it the best soap opera ever written.

Think about it – it starts with Adam and Eve disobeying God and getting thrown out of Eden; then Cain kills his younger brother over Cain’s perception of how God appreciated his offering; Ishmael and Isaac set against each other as brothers by Sarah’s jealousy and Abraham’s refusal to intervene; Isaac almost sacrificed on the mountain; and then the twins Jacob and Esau. Esau loses his birthright to his younger, crafty brother, who spends most of his life being tricky, and not just with his brother and father, but with his father-in-law. In fact the trickery between Laban and Jacob may be one of the funniest in the Bible.

And then, we get to those two wives, Leah and Rachel, and their two maids, who all become interlocked in battle over having sons for Jacob, using all kinds of trickery to spend time with Jacob or have one son find favor with good old Dad. And Joseph, in fact, does become his favorite, probably because for a long time he was the only child Rachel, his favorite wife, had.

Then the sons start all over with trickery – first by selling Joseph into slavery in Egypt, and then with their own families. Judah won’t let Tamar marry his third son after she becomes a widow by his first two sons, so she tricks him and has twins by him (Perez, by the way, becomes an ancestor of David and Jesus). And then when famine hits in Israel and Jacob sends the sons to Egypt, Joseph performs several acts of trickery against them. Genesis ends with Jacob on his death bed, telling each son what the results of their lives will be – good or bad. The book ends with Joseph living in Egypt until dying at a good old age.

The whole book focuses on that original promise to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, and this desire to have children often becomes either a long waiting game due to infertility, or a contest between brothers as to who is going to lead the family. Issues of procreation become issues of power. Who will live on? Who will inherit? Who will God bless the most? Genesis shows us family dynamics with all their messiness. It’s reassuring that we don’t have some perfect set of ancestors to look back upon – God loved them all and redeemed them so that they would survive and spread out into communities that believed in His loving grace. That gives us hope for our own messy families and our future as God’s people.

Jeanne