

12th Sunday after Pentecost (Year B)

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*Genesis 28:10-22*

*Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.' Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!' And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'*

*So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you.'*

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*Recently, Pastor Stephen's dog, Elsie, was digging in the sand at Hay Beach on Shelter Island and she unearthed what many historians have confirmed to be an authentic record of the private diary of Jacob which chronicles his accounts of the events of Genesis chapters 25 through 28. Below are excerpts from this incredible find...*

*30 days prior to birth.*

*I'm not quite sure what day it is because, let's face it, I'm only a fetus. There's only so much to do when you are in your mother's womb. You sit. You wiggle. You listen to the muffled sounds of the outside. And that's pretty much it. My mother's name is Rebekah and I'm stuck here in her tummy with a ugly little hairy alien which I believe is my brother. You probably don't remember being in your mother's womb so let me remind you that there is not much room. Especially when you are sharing it with another baby. We get pretty bored in here so most of the time I keep myself entertained by kicking my brother. He kicks back but I'm the stronger one.*

*Day 1*

*Today was my birthday. My brother and I could tell it was about time to come out because we barely had enough room to kick each other. In the minutes before we left the womb, we fought with each other to get out first. We struggled and clawed at each other but my hairy stupid brother beat me too it. But I didn't give up *that* easily. No...I grabbed him by his heel and used him to get out. Our parents looked*

at us and gave us names. My stupid brother was really hairy and kind of looked red so my parents called him "Esau." As for me, they called me "Jacob" because that means "he who seizes by the heel." I'm so mad at Esau for winning and being born first. I can tell you something, that's the *last* time I let him get the better of *me!*

*Day 5,000*

Today, I'm sitting around the house doing what Mom tells me to do. See has always seems to like me better than my stupid, hairy brother Esau. I mostly stay around the house or in tents and live a quiet life. Esau is very different from me, though. He likes to be outdoors. Most days he spends out hunting with Dad or gardening things in the fields. Dad always like him more than me. I think it's because he always loved meat and Esau is the one who brings it home. But Mom cares more for me because I'm, obviously, much better than Esau. So what if I'm a mamma's boy? My mother is clever and I have a feeling it's gonna work in my favor one of these days!

*Day 7,000*

I may not be great at hunting and gardening but one thing I *can* do well is cook! That stupid brother of mine spends all his days gathering meat and vegetables but he doesn't even know what to do with them. He cooked once. It was what evil must taste like.

Anyways, today I was cooking a nice tasty stew. You know, one of those stews that fills the house with a smell that makes your mouth water. As I was stirring the stew, Esau came in from a long day in the fields. Boy, he looked famished. As I stirred the pot, he asked me for some stew. He looked like he would do *anything* to get his hands on that stew.

A lightbulb went off: I have something that he wants and he will do anything to get it. I told him that I'd give him all the stew he wanted if he would give me his birthright. You in case you don't know, the only reason my brother has his birthright and all the land and inheritance that comes with it is because that jerk beat me out of my mother's womb by like 15 seconds...*15 seconds!* Maybe he is just hungry enough and stupid enough to give me his birthright for this bowl of soup.

And do you know what? That idiot fell for it! He was so blinded by his hunger and exhaustion that I was able to trick him out of his birthright! Didn't I tell you that day would be the last time he got the better of me?

*Day 7,001*

Esau seems really grumpy. I have no idea why.

*Day 10,000*

Dad's getting really old. He can hardly see anymore. Mostly he just sits around the house and does nothing.

*Day 10,500*

Dad's really close to dying. The doctors have told us he only has a day or two left. When a father dies, he gives a blessing, *one blessing*, to *one* of his sons and I have a feeling that Dad's gonna give it to Esau cause he's the older one. I told Mom that I was worried about this happening and she said she

would think of something. As it happened, today Dad told Esau (who, for some reason, is still grumpy) to go out and hunt for him and bring back a nice savory piece of meat. Not long after Esau went out, Mom came to me and pulled me aside so that Dad couldn't hear us. She told me to do exactly as she said. She told me to go get some nice lambs from the flock and to bring them to her so she could prepare them as Dad liked. Then she told me she would give me the food to give to Dad so that he would give *me* his final blessing before he died instead of giving it to my stupid, hairy brother.

Now, unlike my moronic brother, I'm a pretty sharp cookie. I pointed out to my Mom that Dad is blind and he might feel me and realize I'm not Esau because, unlike Esau, I am *not* a big walking carpet who sheds all over the house like our cat. Mom thought about it and told me to put on the skins of the lamb we slaughtered so that if Dad felt me he would think it was Esau's hairy skin. So I did as my mother told me.

Our plan worked like a piece of cake! My old father had his suspicions but, in the end, he felt the skins of the sheep on my arms and neck and he thought I was Esau. And just like that, Dad gave *me* his final blessing and I skipped away joyfully and told mom the good news.

Just as I skipped away, my brother came back and he and Dad realized that they had both been duped. But it was too late! Dad had already given me his final blessing; there was no taking it back! I have successfully tricked my brother out of *both* his birthright and his blessing. Not too bad for a younger brother, eh?!

*Day 10,501*

I don't know if you know what a conniption is but I'm pretty sure my brother is having one right now. His face is more red than it usually is. He is walking around with clenched fists and muttering beneath his breath. Mom tells me she overheard him plotting to kill me. So she told me to get my stuff together and to run away until Esau takes a chill pill and cools off. So I packed my bags and fled.

*Day 10,502*

Running away.

*Day 10,505*

Still running away.

*Day 10,506*

Ok, I have to stop for a breather. What's the point of escaping the murderous hand of my brother if I die myself from heat exhaustion. This looks like a good enough spot as any; I think I'll set up camp here tonight. Don't have a pillow so I guess this stone here will have to do. It's no tempurpedic but it'll have to do.

*Day 10,507*

Had a really, really weird dream last night. I dreamed that there was this ladder thing that reached from the ground all the way up to heaven. There were so many colors and I remember seeing these angels climb up and down the ladder like a bunch of bees on a beehive. And as I was watching this spectacle, this person comes up to me and tells me that he is the Lord, the God of my grandfather

Abraham and the God of my father Isaac. He tells me that all the land I can see will be given to me and my family and that my children shall be as numerous as the sand beneath my feet. He told me that we were going to spread to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south and that everyone, *everyone* would be blessed through *me*! Then God said that he would be with me and keep me wherever I went and that he would bring me back to this land and that he would not leave me until he had done all that he had promised.

And then I woke up!

Now, I've had dreams before and some pretty weird ones at that but I've never had a dream like *this*. This is something different. What if it *wasn't* a dream? I don't know what to make of it but I know that I feel...different. Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not even know it! This is different, this feels important, this feels like something bigger than me that is calling me. This must be the house of God that I've stumbled upon. I think I'll call it "Bethel."

So I took the stone that I used for a pillow and I set it on the ground and made it into a pillar and I poured oil on the top of it.

Now, I know this is a holy moment but, let's face it, I am still Jacob and I like to take full advantage of any situation that presents itself to me. Therefore, I looked up to heaven and told God, "thanks for your covenant but I have some conditions of my own. *If* you will be with me and *if* you will keep me and *if* you will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear and *if* I come again to my father's house in peace, *then* you can be my God."

God didn't say anything so I assumed he said "Ok."

*Day 10,508*

I've had another day and night to process the crazy stuff that happened yesterday. In case you're wondering, I didn't have any dreams last night; my sleep was surprisingly undisturbed. But I'm left with some unsettling questions of myself. Why is God choosing *me* of all people? After all, I've never been that particularly "religious;" I've always left that stuff to other people. If you have read my previous entries you would no doubt notice that I'm not going to win an award for honesty and integrity any time soon! In fact, most people call me a trickster, a relentless pragmatist, or just a downright jerk. I can't say I blame them. So why in God's name would God choose *me* to be the bearer of this cosmic promise? I mean, look at me! I don't exactly fit the description of those who have received this promise before. Take my ancestor Noah. God made a covenant with him because he was a nice guy. Or look at my grandfather Abraham, God made a covenant with him because he found him to be righteous. Most people would not call me either nice *or* righteous.

So why me?

Does God sees something in me that I don't yet see in myself?

*to be continued...*