



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

July 12, 2026:

Pentecost 8A (Proper 10): Genesis 25:19-34; Romans 8:9-17; Matthew 13:1-23

Sibling rivalry is an ongoing theme in Biblical literature. There's Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Leah and Rachel, and Mary and Martha. I'm a twin, so I resonate with the competition between Jacob and Esau. My brother was born first, weighed twice as much as me, and has always been a little bigger and stronger than me. Competition? I was just ahead of him in class rank in high school, but he got his doctorate first, has published several books, and - until recently - had a bigger house. I got married and had kids first and worked overseas before him. I haven't written a book but have written more than 1000 sermons. Though we sought to differentiate during high school and went to different colleges, we - without talking to each other - both went to New York City for graduate school and both bought Honda Minivans, Toyota Priuses, kayaks and green canoes. We have even shown up at parties wearing the same outfit. Though we work in different arenas, much of what we do is very similar. We are now very close - and of five siblings we grew up with and six other steps - the two of us almost always agree.

The biblical siblings I mentioned weren't so lucky. Many of their situations were made worse by favoritism or mistreatment from one of their parents. In today's reading Rebecca clearly favors Jacob and likely helped cook the stew used to cheat Esau out of his birthright. Not long after this, she helped Jacob trick Esau out of his father's blessing. Eventually, after 20 years of animosity and angst Jacob and Esau will be reconciled. This morning is just the beginning of that journey. Today's gospel is about planting seeds. For Jacob and Esau seeds of hope will eventually germinate. Today, however, those seeds seem to be falling on rocky ground.

This brings me to the parable of the sower. Like several of the readings from the past couple of weeks, the Parable of the Sower is part of Jesus' training of the apostles before they go out into the world. This parable gives a simple message: Don't take it personally if all the seeds you scatter don't sprout. It's not your fault. Germination with crops is never 100%; in people it's often a lot less! This echoes the message from a few chapters earlier (Matthew chapter 10) in which Jesus warned the apostles that some places would not accept them and that they would have to shake the dust off their feet and go on somewhere else. In this work, there will be people who are "hard ground," who put up barriers that are difficult to break through. There will be people who are the "rocky ground," who start with enthusiasm but quickly lose interest. There will also be some in whom the gospel

will take root and grow. We welcomed hundreds of people here yesterday at the fair. Most of them will probably not take the next step and come back for church and learn who and what we are all about. Some, however, will. Our job is not to worry about that but to keep inviting them and welcoming them in. Our job is to keep planting seeds.

This parable, by the way, isn't just asking us to be planters of seeds but to be recipients of them as well. This is the challenge to be fertile ground ourselves and allow seeds that were planted in us to grow. It is a reminder to not become hard ground, rocky ground, or ground choked with weeds, to not to let busyness or distractions close our hearts and minds, keep our spirituality stuck on a superficial level, or otherwise not allow our deeper roots to grow. Many of you come this morning a bit exhausted from the fair. Take a moment to breathe, be quiet, and still. This morning is a chance to refresh, refuel, and reconnect. You work really hard and are going all the time. You are a human being - not a human doing. You don't have to do it all yourself. You aren't alone. As our second reading says, the Spirit of God dwells in you. It's easy to forget the God part of it all. In 1 Corinthians 3:6, Paul says "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." Though sometimes it may feel like it, it's not all up to us. We plant. Others will water. God is here to give the growth - even when that growth is in us.

Sibling rivalry is an ongoing theme in Biblical literature. Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Leah and Rachel, and Mary and Martha. Whenever two or three are gathered, tensions can exist. The Good News is that God and will can work through and in the most challenging of relationships, including our own. Our task is to plant seeds. Our task is to be fertile ground. God will take care of the rest.