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## LESSON 3

*JACOB AND ESAU*

WHERE YOU’LL FIND TODAY’S STORY In the Bible (We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version* Bible): **Genesis 25:19-34 Genesis 27:1-45**

### SUMMARY OF TODAY’S STORY

Rebekah, Isaac’s wife, gives birth to twins, Jacob and Esau. Esau grows up to be a hunter, loved by Isaac, while Jacob grows up in the tents, loved by Rebekah.

One day, when Esau comes home hungry, Jacob gives him some bread and stew in exchange for Esau’s birthright (the rights of the firstborn).

Later, when Isaac is dying, Jacob claims this stolen birthright by deceiving Isaac into thinking Jacob is Esau and thus blessing Jacob, the second-born, instead of Esau, the true firstborn. Jacob then has to flee to escape Esau’s violent anger.

### KEY CONCEPTS

* Deceit vs. carelessness
* “Incarnational” faith
* Blessings all around us

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### WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

We feel sorry for Esau, an affable man with thoughts only for his present needs. Esau is dearly loved by his father, Isaac, and is clearly a genial figure, who loves and cares for his father. But it is Jacob who receives his father’s blessing, although Jacob is a liar and deceiver, crafty and easily manipulated by his mother. Some of us can’t help wishing it were the simple Esau that wins out in this story of sibling rivalry. Jacob does not deserve the blessing that Isaac gives, the blessing of Israel. But neither do we! And how much blessing do we receive from God, though undeserving, as dishonest and crafty in our daily lives as Jacob!

Let us look at Jacob and Esau.

Jacob strives for the blessing, and for the right to bear God’s promise. He had fought for it since his own birth, trades for it when he can, and then scrambles for it at the end. His desire is for that higher meaning in his life that God offers.

Esau, on the other hand, gives up his destiny on his own. He trades his birthright—and the rights due to the eldest son—when he hungers for the stew Jacob was cooking. This careless disregard or unconcern for his own destiny, and thus for the destiny of his descendants, lost him his blessing. Unlike Jacob, Esau had not cultivated the habit of searching for God and listening to God.

So Isaac could give to Esau the blessing of his affection and love, but now he could never give the full blessing of the destiny that Esau had himself denied. Esau had laid judgment on his own life, which Isaac could not alter.

Later, God extended the blessing of the People of God, the Hebrews, to include all people of God, through the life and work of God’s Son, Jesus. Then, at last, Esau and his descendants receive God’s promise. God stays with us, no matter what, even when we deny him. For we are God’s people.

### A black and white drawing of a shield AI-generated content may be incorrect.THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

Again, blessings from God! Because the Anglican and Episcopal faith is such an incarnational faith, seeing God in all of daily life, including the rhythm of time and seasons, there is an openness to noticing God’s blessings in all things. The Prayer Book is full of thanksgiving for blessings, as are the hymns in the *Hymnal 1982*.

As a liturgical and sacramental church, the Episcopal Church has distinct orders of ministry and service: bishops, priests, deacons and laity. In this order, the bishop and the priest may offer blessings to the people. At the end of the Holy Eucharist and other services, there is a Blessing. This is always performed by either the bishop, if present, or by the priest.

The Holy Eucharist, celebrated each Sunday, begins and ends with blessing. So like Jacob, we too strive for blessing and the right to bear God’s promise.

Baptism, our inclusion into the household of God, is both the sign and the receiving of that promise.

### WEAVING GOD’S BELOVED COMMUNITY

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Jacob really wanted Isaac’s, and thus God’s, blessing. He knew that any blessing on him would accrue to all of his descendants. Esau, on the other hand, had not thought ahead of his next meal, so gave up his rights as the eldest for a hearty lunch. Blessings are important, but it seems that neither Jacob nor Esau knew that God gives blessings in abundance, not only in material worth but also in inner spiritual resources that might serve us well in times of adversity and struggle.

God’s Beloved Community is, in a way, founded on the recognition of all the blessings we have in this life and an appreciation of the blessings and the gifts of others with whom we share this planet. And what God gives so abundantly, we should not hoard. Our riches are meant to be shared, not hidden.

What are some blessings in your life? (Keep in mind that blessings can be physical objects, but they also can be something that isn’t tangible)

How can you share your blessings, even the ones you can’t hold in your hands?

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# Genesis 25:19-34 (Esau trades his birthright); 27:1-45 (Isaac blesses the wrong son)

**Twins!**

Isaac is now grown up. He marries a woman named Rebekah.

Now Rebekah is going to have a baby—two of them. But the twins are heavy in her, and they fight inside of her. Rebekah is very uncomfortable. She could feel the feet of the babies kicking inside her womb, and it hurts. It is hard having one baby inside, kicking and squirming, but when two babies kick, she can’t sleep.

Rebekah prays to God. “Why is this happening?” she wails. “They’re not even born yet, and they’re already a bunch of trouble!”

God says, “That’s because your sons will be two nations, and they will be at war with each other. The younger one, the one who comes out last, will win. They will fight each other, and they are practicing inside of you.”

Finally, it is time for the two babies to be born. They first one is Esau. He comes out all red and hairy. Then the second one comes, holding on to Esau’s heel with his tiny hand. That’s Jacob.

Esau grows up to be a hunter. He loves to be outside. He loves to hunt deer and other animals and bring them home to his family to cook. Jacob doesn’t like the outdoor life so much. He likes to say inside the tent and help his mother Rebekah. You won’t find two more different twins.

Esau is Isaac’s favorite, but Rebekah loves Jacob the most.

**Esau Stops Being the Older Brother**

Esau is older than Jacob—by around three minutes. What does he get by being the oldest? Maybe he gets a bigger piece of meat for dinner. Maybe he gets to be first to pick the chores he needs to do, or first to go hunting with his dad.

But most important, being the oldest means that he gets his family’s land when his parents die. And he gets the honor of being blessed by his father. With that blessing comes a wonderful future. That is called “birthright”—the oldest son’s right to favors, just by being born first.

But Esau’s birthright doesn’t fill his stomach when he’s hungry. And Esau is hungry today. He has been hunting all day without a bite to eat.

When he comes back to the big family tent, he can smell a wonderful smell. Food! Delicious lentil stew! Jacob is at the stove cooking.

Esau stumbles into the tent. “I’m starving! Give me some of that red stuff you’re cooking there!”

Jacob’s answer is a surprise. “Sell me your birthright. I’ll trade my stew for your birthright.”

What’s a birthright when you’re so hungry? “Who cares about that?” Esau says. “I’m about to faint and you’re talking about some birthright. Take it!”

Jacob says, “Promise.”

“I promise! Give me a big bowl!”

Jacob smiles and ladles out a big bowl of yummy lentil soup for Esau— who has just become his younger brother. Jacob is the older brother now. He even gives Esau a piece of bread to soak up the gravy.

**Isaac Gives His Oldest Son a Blessing—But Who Is That?**

After many years, Isaac’s eyes have gone bad, and now he is going to die soon. But first, he wants to give his oldest son a blessing. He does not know that

Esau gave away his place as the oldest, trading it for a bowl of stew, and that, really, Jacob counts as the oldest even though he is younger.

So Isaac sends for Esau. “My dear son Esau, go hunt a deer and bring it home, and make my favorite dish for me. You know how to cook it the way I like. After I eat, I will give you a special blessing.”

So Esau goes out into the woods.

Rebekah is listening. Rebekah loves Jacob best, and she wants Jacob to have Isaac’s blessing. She goes to Jacob’s tent.

“Jacob,” she says. “Esau is out hunting. He is going to make your father’s favorite dish and then he will get your father’s blessing. I want you to have that blessing instead. Hurry and make a stew that tastes like what Esau makes. When it’s ready I will tell you what to do next.”

Jacob is not sure, but he does what his mother tells him to do. When the stew is hot and ready, he goes to his mother Rebekah. She is waiting for him, holding a piece of animal fur in her hand.

“What is that?” Jacob asks.

“This fur is what you will use to pretend to be Esau. You are going to be Esau when you go to your father. But he will never be fooled if he manages to touch you. Here, tie this furry skin around your arm and you will be hairy just like your brother.”

So Jacob goes into Isaac’s tent holding a bowl of spicy stew and wearing a furry sleeve. He does not look much like Esau. Will Isaac be fooled?

“Here I am, father,” says Jacob, opening the tent door. Isaac is lying in bed, just like he always does since he has gotten old and blind.

“Who are you?” says Isaac. “I am Esau, your son.”

“You don’t sound like Esau,” says Isaac. “Come here and let me feel you.” Jacob holds out his right arm, the one with the animal fur stuck to it. Isaac feels the fur. Esau is very hairy today! “So it *is* you, Esau. Did you bring my favorite dish with you?”

Jacob gives Isaac the bowl of stew. Isaac gobbles it up. Then he says, “You don’t sound like Esau, but I guess you are Esau. Come here, and I will give you my blessing.”

So Isaac says to Jacob, “May God give you the riches of heaven and earth.

People will serve you and bow down to you. Your brother and all nations will do that. Everyone who curses you will be cursed, and everyone who blesses you will be blessed.”

Then Jacob runs out of the tent. Esau will be here soon.

**Does God Only Have One Blessing?**

As soon as Jacob disappears, Esau comes into the tent. In a booming voice, he says, “Here I am, father, with your favorite food!”

Isaac is surprised. “What? I just *ate* my favorite food! And I just gave you my blessing! Did you forget? Or did you come back for more?”

Now Esau is confused. “Father, I just got back from hunting the deer, and I just finished making this stew that you asked me to make. What is going on?”

Isaac says, “Then who just fed me? Who did I just bless?”

Esau’s eyes narrow. He closes his hands into a fist. “It must be my brother Jacob,” he growls through his gritted teeth. “That Jacob! But Father, will you give me a blessing, too?”

“But I cannot,” says Isaac. “I gave my one blessing to the firstborn son.

What do I have left?”

“Father, please!” Esau starts to weep. “Please! Have you only one blessing? Is there not another blessing for me?”

Isaac sighs. “It will not be the same.”

“Father, please!” says Esau, weeping.

Then his father says, “Your home will be away from the riches of heaven and earth. You will live by your sword, and you will serve your brother and bow down to him. But there will be a time when you will no longer have to serve him.”

**Esau Is Angry**

Esau walks out of the tent, steaming. He says out loud, “That Jacob! He took my blessing! I hate him! If I see him, I’ll kill him! I’ll kill him!”

Rebekah stands near Isaac’s tent, hiding from Esau. She hears him, and runs to find Jacob.

“Quick, you need to run away from here! Esau will kill you if he sees you!

He means it!”

Jacob grabs a coat and a bag of food, and he runs. Now there is only a family of three, and one is dying.