

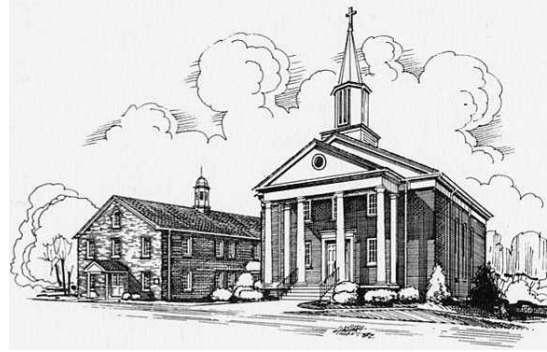
The Lessons Appointed for Use

on

Proper 10

Year A

RCL



Genesis 25:19-34
Psalm 119:105-112
Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

The Collect

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Genesis 25:19-34

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;

the one shall be stronger than the other,
the elder shall serve the younger.”

When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!” (Therefore he was called Edom.)

Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Psalm 119:105-112

Lucerna pedibus meis

105 Your word is a lantern to my feet *
and a light upon my path.

106 I have sworn and am determined *
to keep your righteous judgments.

107 I am deeply troubled; *
preserve my life, O LORD, according to your
word.

108 Accept, O LORD, the willing tribute of my lips,
*
and teach me your judgments.

109 My life is always in my hand, *
yet I do not forget your law.

110 The wicked have set a trap for me, *
but I have not strayed from your commandments.

111 Your decrees are my inheritance for ever; *
truly, they are the joy of my heart.

112 I have applied my heart to fulfill your statutes

*

for ever and to the end.

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other

seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

“Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the

lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

SERMON

A “birthright”. What a concept! What did Esau do to come by this great benefit? Nothing. Valuable as it is, it came to him by accident of birth, rather than as a result of any effort, or, indeed, merit on his part. Esau didn’t get the birthright because he was a better person than his brother or, indeed, because of anything he did. Being the holder of the birthright says nothing about Esau’s worth as a human being or even about his father’s love for him. He just was born first.

Nonetheless, his father DID favor him over his brother who seems to have been a quieter, more peaceful and perhaps more settled son:

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful

hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

It's not a great step from thinking of this accident of birth as a sign of God's selection of Esau as the future father of the promise to the idea that Esau must be special in some way, more beloved, rather than just another part of God's creation with a part to play in it. Americans make this mistake all the time. We get to live in a blessed place and time in history where we have so many blessings. That is our birthright so surely God must love us best. To get that idea out of our heads, we have to turn to Matthew's parable of the four soils.

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he

sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

It’s so easy for us to imagine ourselves as the good soil and others as the non-productive soils so that we can cling to our flattering notions of being special, but I’d like to suggest another interpretation of the parable.

Quite apart from the harvest, each of the other parcels of ground has its own, unique, contribution

to make to the health of the enterprise. The path, though unable to contribute to the harvest, is still a useful, even a necessary, part of the farm. It is over the path that people move to and fro, reaping and sowing. In the same way, the rocky ground has no soil on it because it serves as a drain and the soil has been washed away. Even the thorns have a job to do. People of the time planted thorns as fences. So, because of the nature of each parcel, each has a contribution to make to the overall enterprise, even though only one is able to add to the harvest. It's not as if the path could will itself to be something it isn't, or that the drain could suddenly, by an act of will, become productive.

Nevertheless, it is the harvest which is important,

and Jesus explains that we're speaking of people, not dirt.

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

Jesus is warning us of the perils of the world.

This is the world in which we live. Many, many people are actually starving. Many more, like Esau, think they are starving when they are only hungry.

These become distracted from the work at hand and trade their birthright for a bowl of beans.

Many, many people come to our faith with great joy as long as it does not require anything difficult from them. When the first challenges arrive, when they face the need to reflect and repent, they fall away. Many, many people find themselves in situations beyond their capacity to manage and even their initial commitment is choked by the grief or fear in which they find themselves. Recall that only Jesus had the courage to walk to Golgotha.

If the harvest is to be plentiful, we have much

work to do. God has scattered His seed. We must now bring in the harvest. That can only be done by rolling up our sleeves and addressing the inequities in our world which choke our brothers and sisters. That can only be done by healing the hurts of the world. That can only be done by addressing the hunger and the untreated sickness that distracts those who suffer. We must tend God's crops. We must never, through inertia or unwillingness, be unaware of the suffering of others, or through some sense of privilege turn from our task of bringing in the sheaves. That's why we're here.

So, how to begin? If each of God's children is to flourish, then each of God's children must have access to the resources to do so. Anything that stands

in the way of the harvest snatches away what is sown in the heart, and that includes the human-constructed structures that advantage one person over another based upon something so foolish as skin color. We are living in a time in which we can actually address that. The door to the threshing floor stands open before us! Bring in the harvest. Look, honestly, at that which impedes the harvest and work to correct it!

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Austin Farrer, Warden of Keble College, Oxford, prayed, “Oh God, save me from myself, save me from myself ... this masterful self which manipulates your creation ... this self which throws the thick shadow of its own purposes and desires in every direction in which I try to look, so that I cannot see what it is that you, my Lord and God, are showing to me. Teach me to stand out of my own light, and let your daylight shine.”

May we hear truly this prayer.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be
gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and

give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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