

TANGLED WEB
Jacob and Esau
[written in oral form]

Genesis 25, 27, 28, 32,33
Sunday School series

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Raise your hand if you are the youngest child,... if you're the "baby" of the family. I'm in that group, too.

Okay,.... the rest of you can leave..... just kidding.

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As the youngest, we learned to be sneaky to survive.  
The older sibling or siblings were bigger, so you we learned to be smarter/ we had to be slyer, even trickier.

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Today's story is just that: it's about the younger outmaneuvering the elder brother. In this story there is creative intrigue; there's deception; there is symbolism..... and lessons galore to be gleaned.

All of us enjoy a good story, and I think we are attracted to ones that possess a complicated plot of deception, especially if the underdog protagonist prevails.

The Jewish legacy is full of examples of the weaker prevailing over the mighty, brute force of the antagonist, and often trickery was involved. Some of them, including today's story, have the feel of a prisoner bragging to his cellmates about his fantastic bank robbing venture.....it's just too bad he got caught.

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Nevertheless, deception and trickery.....leave a sticky string of deceit and lies that are near impossible to shed.

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The Jacob and Esau story is part of that enduring string.

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They were twins, but Esau was born first and that meant a lot.  
Moreover, he was a big, tough, hairy guy, loved by his father.  
He was the jock.  
Jacob was a tender, homeboy--a momma's boy.

I'm not injecting any bias here. That's what is presented in Genesis.  
This narrative does set the stage for the underdog hero,.....well..that is.....a tarnished hero.

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Being the first born entitled Esau to the birthright. He was destined to inherit the family estate.
And, almost always the first born would receive the patriarch's main blessing, too. The blessing is much like a "last will and testament", with the added push to destiny.
Secondary blessings for other children were also common.

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Strangely, or perhaps Esau's physical development outpaced his mental maturity, Esau gave away his birthright because he was hungry.

Esau declared that he was near death from hunger, or at least he felt that way, so Jacob leaped at Esau's vulnerability and offered to give him stew in exchange for the birthright.

Esau flippantly declared, "What use is it to me", and agreed to the deal.

At the moment, the birthright wasn't helping him at all.

Esau lacked some wisdom.....and the ability to see the future consequences.

The rejection of the birthright is significant; it is insulting.

Yet apparently, Isaac was unaware of this transaction because he did not mention it when he summoned Esau for the big blessing.

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Two aspects are noteworthy at this juncture:

One, it sure seems that Esau was not going to honour his pledge of giving his birthright to Jacob, since he failed to inform his father.

Second,.....and instrumental,.... Isaac could Not see.

Isaac could not see.

He couldn't see objects.....and he couldn't see what was going on.

He didn't know about the trade. He was IN THE Dark!

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To be sure, we are tempted to condone Jacob's creative ploy to deceive his father into thinking he was Esau, in order to receive the coveted blessing.

Yet, Jacob was not entitled to it. He was still the younger child, and the reader must remember that truth.

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The entertaining deception unfolded masterfully, with Jacob's mother's help and with Jacob's canny ability to lie.

All the five senses were used in this charade:

Jacob failed the voice test, but with cunning preparation, he passed the smell and touch examination.

And, the meal his mother made was very pleasing to taste.

It seems that Isaac and Esau were alike; they both loved to eat.

Nevertheless,.....Isaac could **not** see.

Seeing is so important. More accurately, truly seeing is important.

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Jacob received the wonderful blessing from Isaac, full of great promises, which included being lord over his elder brother.

With lies and deception, Jacob received the coveted blessing.

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Soon after, Esau arrived and discovered what had unfolded, moments earlier. Realizing he would not receive the primary blessing, he released a bitter cry.

Isaac did grant him a blessing, but it wasn't as magnificent as Jacob's.

Still, Isaac promised that he would live, and would one day be free from being under his younger brother's yoke.

Esau's anger was not assuaged, and he vowed to kill Jacob.

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The Genesis story continued, and eventually, the two brothers were peacefully united,.....after some strong, confessional gestures from Jacob.

Even so, that was not the end of the story.....nor was this episode the beginning of deception. The web of deceit continued.

There is a long line of trickery and lies in the Bible.

Cain tricked his brother.

Lot's daughters tricked him.

Joseph was deceived, and in a more playful manner, he tricked his brothers.

Even old Jacob couldn't not shake the sticky web of deception. He tricked his son Joseph when he blessed Joseph's sons, giving the better blessing to the younger grandson.

And, that terrible thread of lies.... continued through David and beyond,.....and it hasn't stopped.

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There are reasons that church people are sometimes called hypocrites.

We tend to value image more than honesty, and I think an age old fear of judgment has devalued our appreciation for grace.

In other words, we tend to be uncomfortable with flaws and failures, even if they are the truth.

Maybe, we can't clearly see grace because of our fears?

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By no means does the church have a corner on deception.

Recently, Sears was accused of inflating their prices before their big clearance sale.

Deception is sadly ubiquitous, and we have to be ever careful when using our computers and smart phones.

Moreover, we've come to the point of distrusting most or all politicians, and sorting valid news from fabricated news is problematic.

(I won't use Trump's term for deceptive and false new stories.)

I dare say, most of us are tangled up with misleading ploys to the point that we have troubling seeing them,..of ..recognizing them and the hazards.

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For example:

What's the harm in buying a gift on sale, then taking off the sale tag, leaving the original,.... in order to impress someone?

Of course, it must be okay to exaggerate on a resume?
And,.....what about our finances, our tax forms....andour accomplishments.. and failures.

And what if no one is harmed by a ploy?

Such as, when someone invites a dislikeable relative to join her for a holiday, fully aware that this person had already made plans to spend the holiday elsewhere. She deceives her relative into thinking that she sincerely wishes to host the relative, whereas in reality, she had no actual intention to extend a valid invitation.

Harmless?

Actually, one person is harmed from this disingenuous invitation?
The one who was deceptive.....because deception is a lie.

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When I was younger, I used a strategy I called "creative misdirection". It's a very common maneuver.

When my mother would ask, "Did you do such and such?"

I'd reply with intensity, "What sort of person do you think I am? Why would you even assume that about me?"

Usually, she'd back off and let it go.

The deception was avoiding her question about an action, and changing it into an accusation about character.

It was a deception. It was a lie.

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Most of the time, deception hurt others. They can be destructive in many ways, especially to trust, clarity, openness and truth.

They are destructive, just as lies are.....because they are lies.

Moreover, they always hurt the one who commits the deception.

Deception often rises from fear and the illusion that we can outsmart someone.

Deception is disrespectful; it is arrogant and selfish,.

Deception is launching the destruction of untruth / of lies and misinformation that will distort one's own perception of reality.

Moreover,.....they are sticky.....like a spider's web.

And, strangely.....or perhaps we are desensitized... we continue the thread of deceit.....over and over again.

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In a way,.....lies / deception make us blind to the truth.

Blind to who we really are.....blind to seeing others clearly....

blind to tolerance and acceptance.....

blind to grace..... and blind to what is healing and life giving.

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Isaac was metaphorically blind,.....and that legacy continued.

However,.....hundreds and hundreds of years later, there was a man who went around and helped people to see.

And, He helped them break free from the entanglement of deception.

He cured blindness for all who received him.

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Jesus....and the others who could see saw that the powerful, corrupt leaders where actually weak.....and stuck in a web.....as they tried to lure others in with them.

That insight / that wisdom..... was intolerable for the web dwellers, and they tried to permanently blind Jesus.....God's gift for seeing.

As we all know, they failed.....and more and more people began to see..... They saw the love of God and they saw grace.

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Yet,.....in time, a sort of cataract has set in on the cult of Christianity.

Illusion and pretentiousness has cast a cloud over..too many.

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SO, Let us pray for healing. Let us seek to clearly see, including our own needs and fears.

Let us be open, honest ... and vulnerable.

Let us see that God's gracious love will sustain us.

And, in that pursuit of grace and love,

May we all see and accept who we really are,.....and may we accept others for who they are: all graciously loved by God.

May we see the consequences and toll that comes from deception.

May we accept the truth even if it is painful, knowing that the truth will set us free.

May we trust each other to be loving, and may that trust be affirmed.

May we not judge ourselves,.....and may we be loving and accepting to others, because we are all flawed..... and all loved by God.

May we live in the present and not be tormented by the past or the future...for they are merely memory and imagination.

May we discover how God can open our eyes, through grace.

And, may we be at peace with what we see.

In addition,.....may we see that even the youngest / the baby in the family can grow up....eventually.

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Finally, may we cease to make entangling webs.

May we clearly see, see that we all want to be loved and accepted.