



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 6
Proper 10 (A)
July 12, 2020

RCL: Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Genesis 25:19-34

This story from Genesis tells us of the early days of Jacob and his brother, Esau. The two were twins, born to their parents Rebekah and Isaac after many years of infertility. The two are seemingly at odds from the very beginning. Even before they are born, they are fighting over the space they have to share. And Rebekah, distraught, asks the Lord why this is so.

The Lord explains to her that “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided.” Thus, from the very beginning, Jacob and Esau are seemingly set for conflict. Jacob takes advantage of his brother – not once, but twice – first tricking him out of his birthright and then out of his father’s blessing. This is Jacob - the father of Israel.

I think a lot about how God has set these two up in conflict and what it means. So often, we look at conflict as a negative thing. Winners and losers. That it is something to avoid or shy away from. There are definitely sides. And we see the winner is the stronger one. The right one. The one who is favored by God.

After Jacob takes his father’s blessing, he leaves his family, afraid of what might happen to him if his brother had the chance to retaliate. But if you know the story, you know that along Jacob’s journey, he has the opportunity for growth. He learns. He changes. He wrestles with those parts of himself that perhaps he wasn’t as comfortable with. And when he meets his brother Esau again, Jacob is humble. Esau greets him with words of compassion and mercy and love.

- We often focus on the rest of Jacob’s story without thinking through his early days. How do you reconcile Jacob’s actions here with the remainder of the story of Jacob?
- How do you approach conflict? In times of conflict, do you tend to shy away or look to understand how God may want you to grow?

Psalm 119:105-112

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. Throughout it, the psalmist exalts God’s word and laws, making clear the psalmist’s efforts to obey God’s laws and keep God’s commandments.

- The psalm uses “you” and “I” language as a conversation between the psalmist and God. Can you see yourself saying these words? If so, how do you measure up against the Psalmist? Which parts do you feel comfortable with and which parts might you still be working on?

Romans 8:1-11

The opening line of this passage is “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

God may not condemn us, but most of us do a good enough job of it ourselves. Shame. Guilt. Blame. Many of us have a hard time accepting the type of free love that Paul talks about here in the Letter to the Romans. We measure our successes against others. We let negative thoughts and self-doubts in and allow them to control our inner narrative. We find it hard to love the bodies God has put us in.

Even when we don’t turn those voices towards ourselves, we readily apply those same filters to others — questioning whether they may be living the way God would want them to, mistakenly thinking that they should be recipients of God’s condemnation and that we are not.

- What place should shame, guilt, and blame have in our inner monologues when the Spirit of God resides in each of us? How can we remind ourselves that the Spirit of God resides not only in ourselves but also in each other?

Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

“Let those who have ears, let them hear!” It’s a well-known phrase. In the New Revised Standard Version, the language is “Let anyone with ears listen.”

In today’s Gospel, Jesus is telling the crowd the Parable of the Sower, and throughout the text, the exhortation both to listen and to hear is repeated several times.

Jesus is talking to the assembled crowd. Wouldn’t they already be listening? Wouldn’t they be hanging on every word, hoping to learn from the teacher? It’s not the only place that Jesus repeats this plea, but this passage perhaps contains the most emphasis, as he tells the story of one who sows seeds liberally, some falling on good soil where they can grow heartily, while others are immediately picked off by the birds, and still others fall on rocky ground where, even if they sprout, they will wither.

Jesus speaks in parables to help make his meaning plain, as he draws parallels between the situations of everyday life and the kingdom of God. Still, Jesus also knows that although we have ears, we often choose not to listen. It is easier to substitute our own meaning for what God is trying to tell us.

- In what ways might God be trying to make something plain to you that it may be easier to overlook? In your life, in what situations are you the fertile ground for the seeds’ spread versus the rocky ground?

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