

Pastor Roy's sermon from February 24, 2019

Put yourself in Jacob's sandals. The deceiver has been deceived yet again. First, he deceived his father into blessing him and all but cursing his brother. He was deceived by his father-in-law Laban and was tricked into marrying two daughters rather than one. He deceived his father-in-law by his shepherding practices and when his flocks became too numerous for all to stay in the same place, he took his growing family and their flocks and left under cover of darkness. Rachel, Joseph's mother deceives her father Laban and steals the family gods likely because she thought they could bless the family. When Laban catches up to them, Rachel remains on her camel with the gods underneath of her in the saddle with the explanation that "the way of women is upon" her. Jacob is then upset with Laban for his accusations. They part on friendly terms and then Jacob offers many gifts to his brother Esau to make peace with him, though it has been upwards of 20 years since he left. Esau has moved on and forgives his brother.

But that is not the end of this story of deception and grace. Joseph is hated by his brothers because he is the favorite son and he is immature and arrogant. The brothers jump him and throw him in a pit and then sell him to traders to be sold into slavery in Egypt. (Really nice brothers. . .) They deceive their father into thinking he was killed by wild animals. Years ago. As Jacob slowly learned to trust by his failures, so did all of his sons.

Now his sons come back from their 2nd trip to Egypt for food during the famine, and they reveal that the paranoid man in charge in Egypt is actually Joseph, their brother, his son. When he sees the caravan which accompanies them, he is convinced and returns to Egypt to embrace his long thought dead son.

So put yourself in the sandals of the deceived deceiver. What are the chances that his son is 1-alive and 2-now second in command in Egypt? Hard to believe! Yet, he believed that the blessing he had worked so hard to find was coming to him without manipulation or control—as a gift. Jacob's trust had grown slowly—his trust in God, his trust in his brother Esau, and in his sons. **He learned the hard way that the more he tried to force, manipulate, and control, the more miserable he was.** So over the course of his life, he learned that God's promises were sure and he came to know **that being blessed was not what he did but who he was.**

And so our faith also comes to *us* slowly as we try to force our way into God's grace. We like Jacob struggle to believe the God promises we are told in our dreams, in our Scriptures, in our relationships. Fortunately God is gracious and the promises are a gift no matter how slow we are to receive them.

Isn't that what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians? Spirit follows bodily, earthly experience, even as Jesus' life, death, and resurrection follow the life and death of Adam, the man of dust. We cannot pull off our own imperishable life beyond death. We cannot understand and manage all of our relationships. Our faith stories are filled with mistrust and unknowing, but we do learn to trust. As Paul says, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. And *so*, we wait with open hands, trusting that God gives good things to those who wait, hope, and slowly learn to trust.

Jacob demonstrates that our faith is not up to us, it's up to God. Faith is foolproof. Yes, trusting is a healthy response, but not even trusting earns us the imperishable resurrection. Whether we trust or doubt, whether we hope or fear, God bestows the imperishable to those who finally leave behind the perishable. Our bodies inevitably wear out and everyone is forced to let go of their stubborn power and release it back to God. Even when it is not a conscious act, the release back to God is sure.

And so, Jesus calls us to love our enemies and give to those who will never pay us back--not as a test of our goodness, but because acting with love sets us free ***before we die***. The children of God know and practice the love of God—who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. We can be merciful because God is merciful. When Jesus says, the measure with which we give will come back to us, he is stating the facts. Those who are tight will live in a tight world. Those who are generous will experience generosity at every turn. We are not earning salvation, we are living the good life—participating in the abundant mercies of God.

This is the love of Christ. This is faith in Christ. This is what Jesus Christ demonstrated on the cross. Love sets us free to trust. Even when hanging on a cross.

May your journey be filled with opportunities to trust deeply in the mercies of God. The greater our challenges and brokenness, the greater our opportunity to release it all in trust to God. The greater our chance to know grace and love. Thanks be to God.