

“The Blessing”

Date: Jan. 9, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 3:13-17

Occasion: Baptism of the Lord; Year A

Theme: Baptism, Blessing

Before I talk to you about Jesus’ baptism, I want to tell you another story. It’s a very ancient story, told in the book of Genesis. It’s a story about two brothers by the name of Jacob and Esau. They were twins. Their father’s name was Issac and their mother was called Rebekah.

Like his father, Abraham, Issac was a pretty old man before he and his wife Rebekah had any children. He was sixty years old. But two sons he fathered to beautiful Rebekah. Like many brothers, there was an intense rivalry between them. In fact, we are told the rivalry started even before they were born, wrestling in their mother’s womb. That must have been some pregnancy!

Esau was the oldest brother. He was a red-head and a real man’s man. He had hair all over his body. He grew to be a skilled hunter and his father loved him. Jacob was the second born. He grew to be a quiet man, who preferred staying close to the tents. In fact, you might call him a momma’s boy. Rebekah loved him best.

When Issac was advanced in years, let’s imagine he was in his nineties, the boys would have been in their early thirties. Issac was feeble and had some health issues. He was pretty close to being totally blind. Well, one day Jacob and his mother plan a trick on the old man. A mean trick.

With a little help from his mother, Jacob dresses up, pretending to be his brother, Esau. He puts on his brother’s clothes, and on the smooth places of his skin Jacob wears the skin of a goat, to imitate the hairy arms of his brother. Mom fixes Dad’s favorite dinner, perhaps it was a venison stew.

Jacob takes the stew and goes into his father's tent. After his father finished eating his favorite meal, Jacob asks his father for his blessing. Issac, the elder father with poor eye-sight, is deceived, and gives the family blessing to Jacob.

Now you have to understand that in Jewish culture, the blessing was reserved for the first born male. That would have been Esau in this family. With the blessing comes all of the rights and privileges of the first-born, including a larger portion of the family inheritance, a bigger cut of Dad's property and wealth.

But more importantly, was receiving Dad's approval. The blessing was more than just a nice social custom. It was of ultimate importance. The blessing was the word of acceptance and approval, the father's best wishes for a lifetime of health and prosperity.

Jacob had stolen the blessing from his brother Esau. Naturally, when Esau found out about it, he was furious! And Jacob had to flee for his life, because his brother had threatened to kill him. You can understand how Esau must have felt. We all yearn for the blessing - for acceptance and approval.

Move ahead now in history, to the time when Jesus was a young man, also in his early thirties. He had grown up in the carpenter shop of his father, Joseph. But now he had more important work to do than building furniture. He had to be about His father's work, building the Kingdom of God.

For years Jesus had studied the Scriptures. Deep in his heart he knew that he had a mission in life that was bigger than pounding nails and cutting wood. He knew that he was sent here for a purpose. We're not exactly sure when Jesus realized he was the Messiah. Did he know as a child? Did he know it when we went to the Temple with his parents at age 12. Or did the awareness grow within him until this moment?

John the Baptizer was roaming the countryside, preaching the message of repentance. Jesus goes out to John and asks to be baptized. At first John refuses, recognizing in Jesus the One who was greater than he. But Jesus insists, because he knew he would be a role model for others to follow. It was the right thing to do. Jesus said, "Let it be so for now, because by doing this we will fulfill what is right."

Jesus was always obedient to God's will, and so He submitted to baptism, not because he needed to be baptized for the forgiveness of sin. No, Jesus was the only person who didn't need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sin. But Jesus was baptized as an example for us to follow. Jesus identified with us in every way, but sin.

And because of Jesus' faithfulness to the Father's will, Jesus receives the blessing of the Father. The spirit descends like a dove and a voice from heaven declares, "This is my son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased." Jesus receives the blessing of Almighty God, his heavenly Father.

The blessing: acceptance and approval from the Father. God blesses Jesus, his only begotten Son. And the growing awareness that Jesus had inside is now confirmed at baptism. He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the one from whom all blessings flow.

So what does Jesus' baptism have to do with you and me? Well, I'll tell you. I'm so excited I can hardly stand it. In Galatians 3:27 it says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ." Do you see what that means? It means the we get to receive the blessing which Jesus received!

"This is my beloved son, my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased." The words were first said to Jesus, but they apply to us as well. Not because of our goodness, but because of our faith. And because of our baptism. We

have put on Christ, and thus we receive the blessing.

Go back to the story of Jacob and Esau. Jacob dressed up like his brother Esau, wearing the skins of a goat to deceive his father. That's how he received the blessing. But in the New Testament, we are instructed by the Father Himself to put on His Son. To believe in His Son and to be baptized in his name. Then the blessing will be given to us - the acceptance and approval of God the Father Almighty.

In Acts 10:43, Peter is preaching and says, "Every one who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name." By faith and by baptism we receive the blessing. God looks upon us and sees not our sins, but instead God sees the righteousness of God's own Son, Jesus our Lord.

Our sins have been covered, blocked out of the Father's sight. Now, God is no dim-sighted elderly man who can't see. But this is God's plan of salvation - that all who believe in Jesus, and put their faith in what Jesus did for them on the cross, and are baptized in His name, they will receive the Father's blessing.

O my friends, this is good news! You know, in all my years of pastoral care, and the years before that as a counselor, one of the most common problems I have seen in the human condition is the desire to be loved and accepted. We human beings hunger and thirst to receive the blessing.

Some people will live all their lives, hoping that their father or mother will speak the word of blessing. "Son, I'm proud of you. I'm pleased with who you have become." It can literally make us crazy NOT to receive the blessing.

Men will strive for it all their lives - in their work and even in their play, trying to be better than the other guy. And women need it as much as the men do, and will find their own way to try and find the love and acceptance that heart desires. It may be the desire to be loved and accepted that fuels the human rat-race,

as we work harder to excel, to achieve, or strive to be beautiful enough - to feel at peace within ourselves.

My friends, when we look for approval outside of ourselves, we are often disappointed. Women can get caught in the trap of trying to please and to serve others. Men get caught in the trap of trying to compete, and they compare themselves to other guys to see if they're doing better. We keep looking for the blessing in all the wrong places. Ask Lindsay Lohan.

No matter how much we do for others, no matter how hard we work and strive to be better than the next guy or gal, we can still feel empty inside. And that's because the ultimate blessing is not found in how many cars are in your garage. The ultimate blessing is not found by being famous, or by having lots of friends, or by our sex appeal.

The blessing which we all yearn for, comes only from God. It comes from within, when we surrender our hearts to Him. It doesn't come from the outside, seeking the approval of others. O, you can get approval from others, but then you become addicted to seeking approval. But that peace that you're looking for comes when you receive the blessing of the Father, that unconditional love of Jesus Christ.

Everyone who puts their faith in Christ, the promise is given - the blessing is for them as well. Dearly beloved, you can't fool God, like Jacob fooled Isaac. You can't hide behind your good works, or your perfect attendance in church. You can't hide behind that smile that fools everyone else. God sees through all of that.

The only thing that God wants to see in us is Jesus Christ. "All of you who have been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ." Your sins are forgiven. God accepts you, loves you, and gives you the blessing. This morning, open your hearts, receive Him by faith and the blessing is yours:

“This is my beloved son, this is my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased.”

Let us pray: