

I. Intro.: [Chef's hat, stage right]

My name is Jacob, and I've never been a trailblazer in life. Rather, I adapt, I improvise, I ... survive. They say I've been this way since before I was born. After all, I am a twin, and my brother Esau was the first one out of the womb. But I wasn't far behind! They say I was literally right on his heels.

It seems Esau & I ... we were destined to mix it up. Even while still in Mom's womb, God told her,
 Two nations are in your womb,
 two peoples butting heads while still in your body.
 One people will overpower the other,
 and the older will serve the younger.
 Sounds pretty good to me ... Seems like God knows what He's doing, right?

II. [Camo hunter's cap, stage left.]

My name is Esau. I'm the reddish one of Isaac and Rebekah's twins ... you know: the hairy one ... the wild one. I'm the firstborn, & my father's favorite! I'm also the honest, hardworking one ... and ... the cheated one.

As long as I live, I'll never forget the day when my conniving brother Jacob showed his true colors. It wasn't enough that he had already swindled me out of my birthright when I was weak and famished. On another fateful day, I expected to finally get from dear Pops the sacred blessing I so deserved, as the firstborn.

With his death perhaps imminent, I knew the kind of wild venison stew that would put Isaac in a great mood to bless me. But that “Jacob”: he did exactly what he's best at – lying and stealing! And it wasn't just him ... my own mother was the ring leader of the conspiracy! No pun intended, but those two fleeced me of everything!

Pops told me that for the rest of my life I would serve my brother! That day ... I swore, no matter how long it took, I would kill Jacob, for ruining my life!

III. [Chef's hat, stage right.]

I had no choice. I had to run away. There was not time to pack up all my best stuff. Esau said he would kill me if he got his hands on me. I knew he would do it, too. He's a hunter, for heaven's sake!

I had to get out of there. I had to turn away from it. It was too dangerous being around Esau. It was too painful, seeing that hurt & disappointment in Dad's eyes. It was just too shameful, realizing what I had done to my brother. They say, "If you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen."

IV.

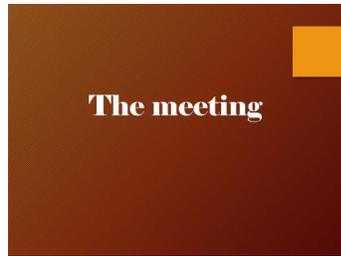
It was almost 25 years later till I saw Esau again. A quarter of a century is a long time ... plenty of time to get married (twice!). Time enough for Uncle Laban to give me a taste of my own lying & cheating medicine. It was also plenty of time for God to bless me with 12 children, and some accumulated assets, including a little breadbasket [*overhanging belly*] You know, that whole middle-aged "thing." I'm doing OK for myself!

But almost 25 years after running for my life, God told me to return to the land of my ancestors. Stupid, right? Who knows where Esau was by then, but if I went back to Canaan I was bound to run into him. And I assure you he would not forget. What kind of fool would take that risk? ... Yet God also said, "Go. I will be with you."

So I stopped running. I stopped using the long distance as my hiding place. After almost 25 years, I turned back ... back on a path I knew would take me to Esau, one way or another. I'm not really sure why I turned toward my enemy, other than that promise from God.

Now after my servants said he was coming with 400 men, I lost all assurance that this was a good idea! This could be a bloodbath! How could I put all my women and children at such a risk? I divided my entourage into 2 groups, so if Esau attacked, maybe some would escape. And then I prayed O I prayed to the God of my ancestors for deliverance!

V.

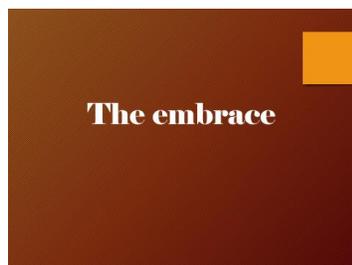


It was a night of testing, of exhaustion and wrestling. If I was going to go down, I wasn't going down without a struggle! I seized that strange man and held on for dear life. In fact I seized the moment, and I wouldn't let him go without another blessing for me ... Have you ever seen the face of God and lived to tell about it?

Next morning, with Esau and his army of hundreds bearing down, I went for broke! I dismounted (unarmed and well ahead of him) so that he wouldn't misunderstand my intentions. I laid myself out there on my knees, bowing before him seven times ... At any time I expected to feel the arrow, the spear or the dagger. I couldn't believe when I heard nothing, no animals charging ... only the sound of someone dismounting, then walking, then running toward me.

I looked up. With my head feeling dizzy, my eyes swimming with tears and amazement, this big red hairy man yanked me to my feet. He smothered me in his embrace, and our weeping was so loud that they told me later Rachel in the back row thought for sure Esau was finally killing me!

VI. [Hunter's cap]



It was the strangest and most disarming day of my life. My men and I were ready for revenge on my treacherous brother. The nerve of him to even think of coming back!

But I started getting confused by all the flocks and herds we met on the way. They said it was some kind of gift? (HA!) Did that schemer really think he could buy favor with me, after all he did?

Yet there was no aggression from him. When he got down and I saw he was unarmed, I made my men halt. But the sight of Jacob bowing down to ME ... it almost made me lose it in front of my men. By the time he bowed the 7th time, I didn't care if my men saw me lose it. I had never, ever seen Jacob humble himself like this! The dam of hate inside me just broke and I saw it was all over. I just had to hold him in my arms again ... There were decades of bitterness released in those tears!

The God of Grandpa Abraham and the God of Pops had indeed blessed Jacob in so many visible, physical ways. I was blown away that my lying, cheating “mama's boy” brother could amount to anything good!

But the most amazing gift of that encounter was these words from his lips. He said:

“To see your face is like seeing the face of God!”

Observations

A. Today we continue our series on conflict and reconciliation after Dr. Malinda Berry last Sunday led us into it with some powerful perspectives.

1. She reminded us that reconciliation, and indeed the gospel itself, looks very different in our country, depending on your skin color.

a) She provided us with some valuable lenses to recall that even our best theology can also be a product of white consciousness and white privilege

b) Although the Bible handed down to us over millennia has hardly changed at all, our own assumptions about what it means for human living may not be as universal as we like to think

2. Let us keep that in mind in this series, as we draw from the wisdom and extensive peacebuilding experience of John Paul Lederach, in his book Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians

a) Much of the deep insight Lederach brings to the subject of human conflict stems from his decades of working at conflict transformation and mediation in violent and even deadly situations around the world

b) For the cause of peacemaking, his own life and that of his wife and daughter have been threatened. He has known the fear and even terror of armed conflicts, not just up in his head from a safe distance, but in his gut down close at ground level

c) I'd like to close with 3 qualities or characteristics Lederach uses to help us mentally grasp conflict and reconciliation

B. How do you think of reconciliation? What is it? Here are 3 ways to think about reconciliation:

1. Reconciliation as journey

a) Story of Jacob & Esau portrays reconciliation like setting out on a journey ... e.g.

(1) There's the journey of the brothers separating, moving apart from each other because of painful conflict. What's behind that separation, that movement apart?

(a) For Jacob it's primarily out of fear for his life, and an inner guilt that he just can't face

(b) And for Esau, bitterness and hatred stand behind his journey, all stemming from his experience of injustice

(c) Has conflict ever caused you to move away from someone (physically or emotionally) because of fear, because of guilt? Has your separation from someone ever been driven by bitterness or a grudge from how you felt wronged?

(2) In this story there's also a journey back toward the enemy, and back

through conflict

- (a) In order to not be forever stuck in his own past, at some point Jacob has to make a turn back toward his enemy brother. And for some reason, whether honorable or not, Esau agrees to come out to meet him.
- (b) Notice they both have to journey in order to meet up. Reconciliation does not happen on either man’s home turf.
- (c) God calls Jacob on a journey through conflict, and God does not promise to make it easy or to take care of everything for him.
- (d) But here’s what matters, (and what gives hope to us when we journey through conflict): God promises to be present with Jacob (and with us) on that journey!

Reconciliation as encounter

- b) Usually conflict erupts from a painful encounter between 2 people. So personal encounters are required for there to be conflict, but the reverse is also true: reconciliation only happens through personal encounters.
 - (1) After 25 years and many miles between them, Jacob and Esau’s enmity with each other did not get reconciled merely with time and distance
 - (2) In this story, we may think of “THE reconciling encounter” as what happened when they met up in Gen. 33 But we cannot assume reconciliation always comes in a single encounter
 - (a) Sometimes it doesn’t come all at once but comes in several encounters, as trust is rebuilt over time
 - (b) Immediately after the embracing scene in the story, that is what I expected to happen: the brothers would keep in touch and gradually restore relationship as trust was rebuilt between them ... But that’s not what happened!
 - (3) One of the curiosities of this story is that the encounters between them seemed to end with that dramatic scene.
 - (4) While personal encounters are what lead us into conflict, we also need personal encounters in order to lead us out of conflict
- c) When we think of reconciliation as encounter, the most significant encounter is not actually with our enemy. In fact it’s with God
 - (1) God promised to go along with Jacob if he returned to the land of his ancestors, even when Jacob knew that the trip would almost surely lead him back to Esau
 - (2) But God was not just present to Jacob at some aloof distance. Along the way to the dreaded meeting with his brother, Jacob had that dream with the fantastic staircase and then he met God face to face, and “mano a mano”
 - (3) To me the most powerful statement of how God often works in

conflict is what Jacob said after embracing Esau: “Truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God!”

(4) As Lederach says, “the pathway through conflict toward reconciliation is filled with God-encounters, if we have the eyes to see, the ears to hear and the heart to feel.” (Lederach, p. 42)

2. Reconciliation as place

a) No matter how well-traveled we are, most of us when we’re on a journey, especially if it’s long or arduous ... we ask “Are we there yet?”

(1) When times are tough, emotions are frazzled and relationships are nearly broken, we get tired of being on this reconciliation journey, and we long for it as a destination

(2) Journeys almost always lead us some place. The Jacob & Esau story in the Bible leads to a place of reconciliation

b) In fact we may think of that open space where 2 long-lost brothers reunited as THE place of resolution, the ending place, but in fact there are several places in the story where significant encounters happened:

(1) Bethel, where God appeared to him in the staircase dream

(2) Mizpah, where Jacob & his father-in-law made a covenant

(3) Peniel, where Jacob wrestled all night with God

c) We know these places were important to Jacob and his faith story because they were all marked with some kind of altar or shrine, and they were all given commemorative names

(1) Marking, naming and memorializing the places was a way for the story of God’s work with God’s people not to be forgotten

(2) Likewise, when conflict tears us down, and reconciliation rebuilds us in new ways, we too need to mark those places where important things happened on that journey at particular times

(a) Is there a “Beth-el” in your life, where you realized that God was in that place and you hadn’t realized it?

(b) Do you have a “Peniel”, someplace where you wrestled with God and came out with some kind of blessing?

VII. Conclusion

A. The Jacob and Esau story in the Bible is not so much a story as a saga, stretching out over 8 chapters of Genesis

1. This saga is a prime biblical reference point in Lederach’s book because we can recognize so much of ourselves in it

2. It is also representative of so much of what happens in reconciliation processes in our world today.

B. As we continue in this series, with the story of Jacob and Esau fresh in our minds, **let us approach the subject of conflict and reconciliation in this manner, as Lederach summarizes:**

9/2/18

“Journey Toward the Face of God”

Text: Gen. (27); 32:1-12; 33:1-16

(Conflict & reconciliation series) 7

[Reconciliation] is the place we are trying to reach, the journey we take to get there, and the encounters we experience along the way. (Lederach, p. 43)

C. May we continue to seek God, and see God, on this journey. Amen