

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Rev. Donald DiXon Williams

RCL: Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 LM: Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14; Romans 8:18-23; Matthew 13:1-23 or 13:1-9

I have always been fascinated by identical twins because of their looks and the special bonds they are reputed to share. I grew up in an era when parents took great pride in dressing their twins in identical clothing. I am still in awe when I hear one twin finish the thoughts of the other. But these two characters in Genesis, Esau and Jacob, have forever altered my image of twins. This passage shows us twins who couldn't be more antithetical.

Before they are born, they struggle with one another in their mother Rebekah's womb. Esau becomes the cunning hunter who likes to be outdoors, while Jacob is the culinary artist who prefers to be indoors. Esau uses his brawn, and Jacob his brain. Their father Isaac loves Esau because he's a macho man, and Rebekah loves Jacob because he's a momma's boy. What really catches our attention in this text isn't so much Esau's willingness to use weapons to get food, but Jacob's willingness to use food as a weapon.

After a particularly grueling stint in the field, Esau comes home famished and wants to eat then and there. Borrowing Romans 8:5 terminology, Esau sets his mind on the things of the flesh (food) and does not attend to the things of the spirit (his birthright). He is desperate, and desperate people will do reckless things to satisfy a particular need. Jacob, in a less obvious way, is also desperate and is willing to use his food as a weapon to trick his brother out of his birthright.

Esau and Jacob's modern-day offspring are still struggling with one another. I cannot help but think of my brothers and sisters in Africa, who for years have been struggling with their siblings, on and off the continent. They struggled as victims of kidnaping. They struggled through the Middle Passage. They struggled as slaves on foreign shores. Now they struggle with hunger, poverty, AIDS, and wars.

The Genesis questions arise again. Are we rich nations collectively using food as a weapon against our kin? Are they willing to sell their birthright for a bowl of pottage? Are we coveting their gold, diamonds, oil, and other valuable birthrights, or will we find ways to help our brothers and sisters develop their land, bodies, minds, and spirits? When we free ourselves from the grasping spirit of Jacob, one day Africa will be able to do to us what Esau did to Jacob. Love us anyway.

Matthew 13 reflects Jesus' words as he explains the parable of the sower, talking about the seeds and where they are sown. Some seeds fall by the way; some seeds fall on stony ground; some seeds fall among thorns, and some seeds fall on good ground. Jesus equates the seeds with words of God's kingdom. As hunger advocates, we know the importance of seeds and of words.

Every morning as the escalator slowly brings me up from the below-ground Metro stop at Union Station in Washington, D.C., I see the very top of the U.S. Capitol and the surrounding area known as

Capitol Hill. It has become my field of dreams for hungry and poor people. Our advocacy work for hungry people is much like sowing seeds. Just like winter, spring, summer, and fall, Congress has its seasons as well. This field has 535 acres: 435 members of the House and 100 senators. Our job is to sow seeds on each acre.

As in the parable, some of our words will fall by the way and die, never being heard. Some of our words will fall on stony ground. A legislator will gladly hear us, but when it comes time to vote for or cosponsor our bill or resolution, that congressperson, sometimes under pressure from others, will fall away. Some of our words will fall among the thorns. These are the ones who will hear our words and not like them. They will actively oppose the legislation, trying to kill it. Thank God, some of our words will fall on good ground and will yield good fruit, in the form of legislation that helps heal the nations. Therefore, when the congressional season is over, with God's help and after all our hard work of sowing, we will have a bumper crop for poor and hungry people all over the world. Sometimes your field of dreams can become a reality.

Children's Time [LH]

This week's parable of the sower, along with the story of the mustard seed in the weeks ahead, offers a chance to develop some seed-based themes, which have useful connections to hunger. Today you might bring in several containers with dirt, some with rocks clearly visible, some with weeds already grown up, some with rich, fertile soil. (If you've thought about this well in advance, you might even have planted some seeds so you can illustrate the result.) Ask which of these is likely to allow seeds to grow into strong and healthy and productive plants. Say that God wants our lives to flourish too and that God hopes we can receive the words God gives us in the Bible and use them as we love other people.

Musical Suggestions

Come, Ye Thankful People, Come—AAH 194
Brothers and Sisters of Mine Are the Hungry—BP 148