

Prayer: *Ever-present God, bless us now as we open ourselves to these stories – stories that are sometimes difficult and which hold tensions, lies, rivalry, promise, beauty and hope. May we wander through them with an open heart to the ways that your presence, truth, and love is near. Amen.*

Last week we heard about the love story of Isaac and Rebekah, this week it is some 20 years later and the fragile thread of God's promise that Abraham would be the father of nations, and Rebekah would be the mother of millions, is once again hanging by that thread. Isaac prays and YHWH answers, Rebekah is pregnant –with twins!

But, **but even** before birth they are fighting each other. Rebekah is so worried she prays to YHWH and is given an answer: What is happening 'now' foreshadows the future: the future of two nations – what will be Israel and neighbouring Edom; the future story of the two brothers – the beginnings of which we heard about today and the future reality of the promise of YHWH God to Abraham.

Wallace: "Unlike the Abraham story, this tale is not about a promise, and whether faith or doubt in the promise will prevail. Here the outcome is not in doubt. **What is unknown is how it will be achieved.** The struggle in Rebekah's womb foreshadows the future struggle between the brothers over what is central to the promise. While God sets in motion the course of events in the narrative, the characters will have a hand in how those events play out. Yahweh's word does not resolve the struggle between the brothers, nor will Yahweh absolve the characters involved of any of their actions or motives. Yahweh **will work** within the struggle to achieve his end."

In the few verses of the story as we heard this morning Wallace maintains we are given a glimpse of the three most important themes in the next nine chapters in Genesis. The unfolding of the characters involved in the establishment of the promise of God to Abraham and his descendants. 1. "First, there is the theme of strife. The twins struggle in birth (v. 26) just as they will in life (vv. 29-34; chs. 27, 35 etc). Strife will emerge in other relationships as mentioned: between Jacob and Laban (ch. 31); Leah and Rachel (30:1); and ultimately between Jacob and Yahweh (ch. 32)."

2. "There is the theme of deceit and theft. In vv. 29-34 Jacob 'steals' Esau's birth-right. Theft of various sorts will re-emerge in the narrative, but so will blessing – by their father (ch. 27), by Laban (31:55), and by Yahweh (32:29). The similarity in words between birth-right (*bekorah*) and blessing (*berakah*) suggests a complex relationship between the two."

3. Finally "there is the theme of inversion. This is prefigured in Yahweh's speech to Rebekah, the elder will serve the younger (25:23). The younger sister Rachel will be favoured over Leah (29:15-20); Jacob will inherit the things due to his older twin, Esau; Joseph will later ascend over his older brothers." HWallace

What is being recorded in our text is that YHWH-God works his promise out – His way. That way may well **not** be according to the assumptions of humanity including assumptions of power, religion, social systems or politics! H Wallace says: "In the Abraham story, barrenness set the scene **and there** was a question of whether faith or doubt in Yahweh's promise would prevail. ->

At the beginning of the Jacob story, strife and deceit set the scene, **and the** issue is how Yahweh's word moves to fulfilment in the midst of a complex, deceitful, and divided world. None of the characters is without blemish. They cheat, steal, deceive, plot, trick and lie. **And yet** these **are the very** people **with** whom Yahweh chooses to become entangled and give his promise. This murky world of human reality is the arena wherein Yahweh's word is brought to fulfilment. As one writer says, 'there is a realism about this text'. It rejects any romantic pietism we might attribute to it." These words, this 'Abrahamic Family's stories are an invitation for us to "engage the relationship between God, God's word, and the complex, often deceitful and strife-ridden world we live in." H Wallace

An invitation to engage – to get real about the world we live in – **with God's word**. This made think – often when we come to the realisation of holding in our hands something precious and or important, *we put it into a safe place*. As I share a couple of months ago – at home we started the process of

having painters in to redecorate. Thanks be they have finished! But last weekend I could begin the process of dusting off and putting back my 'precious' collections'. I admit I engaged myself in debate why was I keeping these "precious" things? All they did was sit on the shelf and collect dust... Of course they are all back because they are precious...

Now it occurred to me that sometimes – *just* sometimes we mistake the kind of 'preciousness' of the Word of God, the promises of God' the texts of our faith stories and we treat them like we do our precious china, models, cars!, books... **What we don't do** is to see that actually the Word of God is given so that **we engage with it** and the complex, often deceitful and strife-ridden world we live in. Not given so that we protect it by keeping it safe on a shelf, collecting dust.

It's actually not our job or worry even, to keep it safe. In fact in the other Bible reading for us to engage with – wrestle with – laugh and cry with Jesus's parable about "The Sower", it's not even our job to sow the seed – or grow it. We have a job, but sometimes we get carried away with just what it is.

The Sower is God (J Petty), and Jesus says God scatters the "seed" – "Jesus", **The Word** (remember in John 1: 'The Word became flesh...') God scatters / has scattered Jesus in every possible corner, place, situation, country, custom, that exists in our world – on our earth. "The four types of soil are meant to signify all conditions of life. Jesus has already been sown everywhere in the world, in good soil and bad, among rocks and among thorns. This sowing of the word into the entire world, and into all conditions of life, has already been done **without** any participation on our part whatsoever."

Even more distressing to those of us who want to be important in the spreading of the Gospel, Petty says "there is nothing spectacular about a seed... Seeds are tiny. They fall into the ground and get covered over. They "die" into the earth. It is **precisely then**, when they are out of sight, that they begin to do the real work of a seed. The message of the story is that the seed 'the Word' sown into the world doesn't look like *all that much*. It can be hard, or even impossible to find. It does its work out-of-sight, mysteriously."

Remember the seed has already been sown. It is not about to be sown. It's already in there, and it's doing what it does without waiting for us to do something to put it into effect. We don't add to the seed of the Word being sown, or complete it, or kick it into gear. Not only has it **been done, it works**. In **every case**, the seed, which is the word, springs up, even in rocky soil and even among thorns. The word--the sown seed, which is Christ--never fails. But the birds, you say? What about the birds who snatch up the seed and carry it away? So what? That seed is still going to land somewhere."

The four types of soil reflect the human condition which all of us share. They are a statement of reality, meant to cover the bases of existence. We fail to understand. We all live our lives in the context of pain and trouble. We all endure "rocks" and lack "root" in the face of oppression. We all live amid the "thorns," which are the "cares of eternity," and "the deceit of riches." This "chokes" us--and doesn't it? Isn't that an accurate description of our reality?

But we also have capacity. The "beautiful earth" is also part of our reality. We don't put the Word into action--Christ has already saved the world, but the Word prospers in some conditions more than others. In "beautiful earth," it "bears fruit" in the world. "Bearing fruit" means "following on the way," which means imitating Jesus, and **doing what he did**.

With Jesus as our model of what the kingdom of heaven looks like, "bearing fruit" means actually doing what Jesus himself teaches and does in the gospel of Matthew, which is: gender equality, open table fellowship, non-hierarchical living, embracing the human dignity of all, resistance to oppression, and resistance to religious corruption. "Bearing fruit" is that programme lived out in everyday life."

In the middle of our everyday life, God – YHWH chooses us as partners, just as Abraham and descendants were chosen so long ago. We are invited to engage with YHWH God, and Jesus right in the middle of our very full, messy, tense lives – and we know that right in the middle – God is present that's the way YHWH wants it. I find that precious! Amen.