

July 16, 2023: Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

Main Idea: God's love stretches past what—or whom—is chosen.

Both our Genesis and Matthew texts this morning highlight the idea of chosenness—of two otherwise similar people or things having vastly different experiences because of what is destined for them.

Even before Jacob and Esau were born, their mother was told that they were fated to be in conflict with each other and conflict is exactly what unfolds between them. We end up hearing Jacob's story in our scripture instead of Esau's. We end up thinking of Jacob as the chosen one between the two brothers, as do many of the members of his community.

In a similar vein, the seeds that Jesus describes in his parable in Matthew 13 are destined for very different outcomes. The farmer scatters handfuls of seeds as he walks along, but the only seeds that stand a chance at blooming are the seeds that land in good soil. The rest are seeds we never see again—seeds we never think about again. We value the seeds that end up bearing flowers and fruit.

But the seeds that fall dormant on the path become nourishment for other types of life. The seeds that sit in shallow, rocky ground provide beauty for a while and then return to the earth. The seeds that land among thorns provide a foundation for growth of other kinds. These might not be the seeds that we deem successful, but God works through them to help all of creation keep thriving.

Similarly, Esau enjoys marriage, has children, and stewards a large swath of land. In Chapter 33 of Genesis, Jacob and Esau reconnect. They embrace each other, weep and forgive each other. It's clear that God never stopped loving Esau, even when our focus stayed on Jacob. God never stopped acting in and shaping Esau's life, and God made a seemingly impossible reconciliation possible.

Chosenness is not as binary as we often think it is. It's more gray than it is black and white. And that is because our God is God of the gray spaces—God's love and God's grace cannot be contained in two, abstract boxes. Jesus meets us exactly where we are—not just where we think we're destined or fated to be—and wraps us in love. He will provide a path for us and redefine chosenness for us by offering us the gift of a shared destiny—a destiny as children alongside Jesus.

Scripture Summary

Jesus tells a vivid parable inviting his listeners to open his hearts to become rich and nourishing soil in which God's word can take root so that they in turn might bear fruit in acts of love for the world.



Other seeds fell on good soil.



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GOD'S WORD for Today

First Reading: Genesis 25:19-34

¹⁹These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, ²⁰and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²²The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. ²³And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." ²⁴When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. ²⁶Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. ²⁷When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. ²⁸Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. ²⁹Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. ³⁰Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) ³¹Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." ³²Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" ³³Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Psalm: Psalm 119:105-112

Second Reading: Romans 8:1-11

8 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴so that the just requirement of the law

might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Gospel: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!" ¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."