

Rappahannock Christian Church – 7/10/11

Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

It is usually a good idea as we gather at this Table to keep things simple. I'm reading a book about a Jewish girl in Germany right now. I suppose that she's going to get caught up in German persecution of the Jews in World War II, but at the moment her father is teaching her the ABCs.

Do you know your Christian ABCs?

- A – “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”
- B – “Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”
- C – “Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

These are the ABCs of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and this is what we celebrate as we come to this Table today. It is only through His broken body and spilled blood that we can be saved. Let us remember that it is in Him alone that we have salvation with God.

Let me take you near to the end of the gospel of Matthew and read what he has written about how Jesus gave this remembrance to us.

Matthew 26:26-29 – While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

The Best Choice

Our Scripture today occurs within a series of stories about Jacob and Esau. More often than not we look at Jacob, but this passage is about Esau much more than it is about Jacob, so today we're going to concentrate on him.

Genesis 25:27-34 – The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.)

Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”

“Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?”

But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

In general it’s not a good idea to start a sermon by telling the end at the beginning, but that’s what I’m going to do today.

The point of my message today is going to be that the choices that we make have consequences. Some of the choices we make are small and inconsequential. (Like shall I take an umbrella to work with me today or not?) We make them all the time. Some are of huge importance. (Whom shall I marry? Shall I invest a large amount of money in this or that high-risk venture?)

Here in this small story, Esau makes a choice and that choice has some very significant consequences attached to it.

Now, let’s acknowledge right up front that Esau's twin brother, Jacob, is no angel. He is a conniver and schemer. But the inspired Biblical writer's summation is that Esau “despised” his birthright. This is a harsh judgment, but it is the one we have to keep in mind.

To be able to understand this story we need to understand common practices surrounding inheritance in the Ancient Near East. In this time, the full inheritance went to the oldest male child. Jacob and Esau were twins, but Esau came out of the womb first, so technically he was the first-born and rightfully should receive the inheritance. Now in those days the inheritance in a wealthy family came with possessions and landholdings, but it also came with some major responsibilities. If the father died leaving a widow (or widows!) the oldest son had to care for them for the rest of their lives. If he had unmarried sisters, he had to arrange marriages for them. If the household included slaves or servants he must get to know the terms of their service. All of this, and more, came with the inheritance. It promised to be complicated and time-consuming. In essence, one would become the manager of a large estate. It's hard to keep everybody happy. It is a job that required diplomacy, patience, administrative skills, and the ability to make hard decisions.

Now Esau was a hunter. He loved the great outdoors. He liked nothing better than to be out in the forest and the fields and to pit his skill, his strength, his endurance against game animals. Does the manly hunter want to become an estate manager? No!

There’s another dimension to this whole thing beyond the mundane and everyday. God has made promises to this family, and these promises *will* be fulfilled through *somebody*. But, as a result of the choice that Esau made, the fulfillment of these promises will not come through him!

Please remember that these things were not written down at the time that they happened. We know the end of the story now. Both men fathered nations. Jacob's line became the Children of Israel and Esau's became the people of Edom. Later Israelites reading this story knew about these outcomes, and would have known the enormous gravity of the statement, "So, Esau despised his birthright." God worked his plans and fulfilled his promises through Jacob. From Jacob came the nation Israel. The Law came through Moses. David became king. The prophets came and delivered the Word of God. Ultimately Jesus, the Messiah, came through Jacob's line.

Jacob doesn't know all of this, but he does know that God is at work. His attitude seems to be, "Hey, I want to be part of that!" Esau's reaction, on the other hand, is, "Go away and leave me alone."

Esau is hungry. He cares more about his stomach than he does about the birthright. Later on he's sorry about what he's done, and he begs his father to give him part of the blessing. But it's too late! He was thinking too little about life's legacy, about the big picture. He was selfish. He was only thinking about NOW, about what he wanted NOW. It's a pretty sad commentary on this young man's life.

I wonder if this story has been repeated in the lives of other young men and women over the years? Perhaps even you and I have made some stupid decisions and taken some actions that we have been sorry about, things that still haunt us.

Let me end on a more positive note. The story, if you read on for many chapters, doesn't turn out too badly. In the end, the brothers are reconciled. They were together at their father, Isaac's, side when he died. Maybe Esau learned some lessons in life. Maybe he wasn't so hard of head and heart that he absolutely refused to change his attitude.

So it seems to me that there are two lessons for us in this story:

1. Don't make bad decisions. Think things through. Think about the big picture. Consider that you *are leaving* a legacy. Realize that God has things He wants to do with you.
2. If you do make a real blunder or a bad decision, don't think that's all over. You can still do important things with your life. There are still things you can do for God. The sins and the bad decisions are in the past. The future is still in God's hands. Don't give up. Don't turn your back on God! Opportunities for service are always going to be there!

Benediction

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. – 1 Timothy 1:17