

The Fourth Sunday of Pentecost

July 10, 2011

Genesis 25: 19-34

Psalm 119: 105-112

Romans 8: 1-11

Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A moment of pity for Esau: he never really had a chance. Even at birth his brother Jacob has a hold on him – literally – holding him back. Not a good start in this world.

Apparently, things never really got better between them. I imagine Esau became a hunter, a man of the field, at least in part to get away from Jacob.

Of course, too, Jacob could truly say, “Mom likes me best.”

So hungry Esau comes home after a long time out in the field, hungry and tired, and Jacob sells him a meal, stew and bread, in exchange for Esau’s birthright, that is, his future. Jacob takes Esau’s place in the family and in the tribe, all for a bit of stew.

Esau is the absolute poster boy for the third category in Jesus’ parable about seeds and sowers. Esau’s thorns are his hunger and his fatigue; he is overwhelmed by his personal cares. All that matters is his own momentary comfort, and so he loses everything.

Jesus, of course, isn't speaking of physical hunger; his thorns, the cares of this world, overwhelm the Spirit, overwhelm faith itself. We have all met the Esaus of this world who say they can no longer believe in God because . . . fill in the reason. God simply doesn't meet their expectation, doesn't do what they want in some situation. They are the soil that has received the sower's seed and let it die.

There are others; there are those who receive that seed and are absolutely thrilled, filled with enthusiasm, but they never go any further. It's all emotional without understanding what the seed is, what the message of the Gospel is, and so, when some other seeds fall, off they go, just as enthusiastic about something else entirely. We've all met them.

There are those whose reception of the seed is transient, short-lived. Theirs is a shallow, superficial faith that simply has no roots. Those are the puzzling ones. They have heard the word, they know the faith, and yet they fall away; neither hot nor cold, just utterly neutral, as though it had no part in their lives. We've all met them, too.

This is getting to be depressing, isn't it? At least it might be if Jesus hadn't acknowledged the fourth type of faith, the "good soil." Those are the ones whose faith has depth, who do not turn away at discomfort or discouragement, who hear and understand what God's grace means in this world and in their lives.

They are the ones who are "free." They are free because they live in what Paul tells the Romans is the Spirit. They are freed from the law of sin and death, the overwhelming concerns of the flesh, because they are secure.

Do we have troubles? That is a silly question; life is not perfect, and nowhere does it say it is supposed to be perfect. We have the promise that no matter how difficult it might be, we have one who has lived with difficulty, an understanding savior, one who can be called

upon to be with us for help and support. One who actually would go to the cross for us. That is the faith that falls upon that variety of soils.

Have you ever heard the cry “HUAU”? The military do it as a response. Do you know what it means? It means “heard, understood, acted upon.” That’s not a bad mantra for a Christian, is it?

In His Holy Name.