

'Ordinary, Calling, Divisions'

Fifth Sunday After Trinity

Genesis 25:19-34.

Now, in our preaching journey through Genesis, the story of Isaac and Rebekah is introduced, from whom will come the one - the son - who will provide the name of God's elect people - Jacob, who will later be named Israel.

My first point is briefer compared to the second and third.

Three words for you: **Ordinary. Calling. Division.**

Ordinary.

Isaac **Prays**, when they have difficulty to start a family, a difficult and emotional and painful situation known by many. And in this case, we hear of divine intervention - as domestic pain is brought into the throne rooms of heaven. And Rebekah becomes pregnant. A miracle child. But things become difficult.

The babies jostle. It must have been dramatic. Not just the twist and turns associated with pregnancy. Not Rebekah simply feeling full or suffering from indigestion, or finding it hard to get the right spot to sleep at night or suffering from a sore back. No this is serious. Her mother is not there, but her nurse, her maids are, and they clearly do not know what is going on. Rebekah is worried.

She **prays**, she in fact **enquires**. She assumes she can talk to God too. Not just her husband can pray. And that as God has spoken to Abraham, he can speak to her, Rebekah. She does not leave the praying to her husband. Nor does she go to God via him like she can have not full relationship herself. She goes and **enquires, expecting God to answer in some way**. Many ask of God, and there is silence. This passage is not a promise that we will *always* have an audible clear response. But it is a statement a reminder that it can happen, we can be expectant, and therefore worth trying. Answers can come in many ways. And when I read this passage, it is so **ordinary, what Rebekah does and what the Lord God does**. She prays, God speaks, it is presented in a very natural ordinary way, God listening regardless if someone is female or male. The Lord desires to speak. He may not speak in our way or the way we expect or perhaps even silence can be the answer, but scripture does not present the Lord speaking as weird or wrong. The biblical sense of it being completely natural, **ordinary**. Rebekah, a matriarch who sets an example – in a very domestic, ordinary setting.

Calling.



Lord chooses one son over another.

The calling is not based upon good works of these two boys or Isaac and Rebekah. The Lord has decided. This is not the first time it is – Abraham asked for blessing upon Ishmael, but the Lord confirms that the promise will be through Isaac – the Lord chooses. The one he has plans for, the one he is calling?

When someone seeks to take on a significant role in the life of the church, for example, it is often said, we tend to focus upon competence - are to do the role. However it is important to consider their character – as we are called to become ever more Christ like as the years go by - and the calling of God. Competence, character, calling. For any role, we would consider all. Calling. The person may have christlike character, the person may be competent, but are they called by God to this role? I say church, but of course calling can be to something secular and not just inside the Church.

Lord's calling upon Jacob – he has been called, before he was born, before he had done anything. This reminded me, of my position and past, I am a vicar not because I wanted to be, I wasn't a missionary because I wanted to be, or because of my Christian character, or any competence, I was called by the Lord into this particular ordained ministry. Sometimes, a calling is what you hang onto. You may struggle with your character, perhaps you find you are not competent as you think, or there may be difficulties and sadnesses swirling around you, yet you know the Lord has called to this job or role.

Calling, can be is *painful*, as it was for Rebekah, we imagine as she heard the Lord's voice. Two nations from her sons. Yet the promise – land, that nations will be blessed through your offspring, and as many descendants as the sea shore – Isaac had heard these words. Yet two nations. Suggests division to come between her sons. Something any parents desires never to happen. Their sons will not be part of *one* people. There will be *two* peoples. One to be strong. A calling can be painful. Not just for the one who is called. But it can be painful for those *around* us. It can bring pain to those *with* us. The sacrifices that can be needed to obey, to live out a calling.

And a calling can be most *unlikely*. The younger will serve the older. Totally unexpected in that culture. And as we read the next verses of the boys growing up, we learn about them. Esau the hunter, Jacob a quiet man among the tents. But surely to establish a nation you need a hunter. There were rival kings around where Isaac lived, for example he lives near Abimelech king of the Philistines, and there are arguments and confrontations over wells, (see Genesis 26 for example). I mean sure, the man you want – the hunter – you do not want the

quiet boy – the one who is quiet you want a warrior ... But the younger serving the older, is not the first time we hear this – Joseph, among the youngest of the twelve brothers, yet the one called to be among the powerful in Egypt. David – in fact, the one who was so ordinary he was not invited to the Bethlehem feast when the great Samuel was present, *you don't want him*, is the impression from David not being invited (1 Samuel 16). Even our Lord perhaps – what does Philip say – 'we have found the Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph!' Nathaniel replies : 'Nazareth can anything good come out of there?'

Division.

Lord's words speak of division. And we see the divisions from the start. Are they struggling with each other, battling to be first? And when they are born – what difference – the hair monster (!) – and the smooth skinned one grabbing the heel – no time to rest in that delivery . Differences over interest as we've said – hunter, the among the tents. Even among the parents. Isaac loved – Esau, we take to mean, his favourite – and Rebekah – loved Jacob. Even in the attitudes of future – Esau saw only his present –like all of us who have kids who cry aloud 'papa ik heb hunger' in such a way as if they will die that moment if we do not give them... Esau in his 'inarticulate appetite' sees only the present; Jacob only looks to the future...a difference of perspective.

It says "*Esau despised his birthright.*" However Jacob has been plotting. Why doesn't he serve or help. No, he wants to gain. He could have said 'No, you can't have any stew.' But instead 'sell me your birthright' – not the normal response when your brother asks you for stew. Like your sister comes in, 'I'm so

hungry, I'm going to die, give me a piece of that cake you made' – you say, give me your electric guitar, or your scooter. Not logical unless you've been waiting, planning, thinking...

So it is all a bit – yuck – after reading this part, it leaves you feeling like you need a shower after this! Jacob, selfish, lacking morals. Esau, rash stupidity, man of the moment and belly. And we know how the story moves on and it doesn't get any nicer. Rebekah becomes involved, (Genesis 27). She betrays her husband, son; Jacob betrays father, brother. Betrayal of husband, son, brother, father to get a blessing.

And that is the amazing thing we end on. The Lord God called Jacob. The Hebrew word we translate for Quiet, is TAM (pronounced 'tawm'). But when this word is used in the psalms and elsewhere it is for 'upright'. Job is described as tam – “There lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright.” Blameless and tam. The word can be acceptably translated – quiet, simple – which translators usually adapt. Yet if we consider the word as it is usually used in OT, 'upright', we see in Jacob's story he has a long way to go, before he is truly 'upright'. But God, works through such circumstances. He works his ways out through situations and people that are ambiguous at best and utterly immoral at worst. God is at work, even when people are not being 'upright' as they should. God's power to effect and achieve salvation and his plans cannot be diminished. Jacob – as we read – will become Israel – Israel will become the name of God's people, this people will become as numerous as the sand on the sea, from this people salvation will come. As we will later sing. *God is working his purpose out.*

Three words. **Ordinary, Calling, Division.**

God at work, God works it out.

Shall we pray...

Revd Grant Crowe