

Sermon for Sunday, July 23, 2023

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

“More than Enough Blessing”

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[Story for July 23](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it”, Jacob says.

The other night, I felt that way about my kitchen, and I was quite surprised by that sense. I often encounter God at the table with my family, with friends and community, but in the actual kitchen - not so much. I can cook and sometimes I even enjoy it. I know feeding people is holy work, but I've not had what I would describe as a divine encounter while cooking. And this particular night, I was in the kitchen for something I really don't enjoy - a craft project.

My grandma and my mom both wore a funny button that proudly proclaimed, “I don't do crafts.” The button has been lost but I've also claimed that as a life motto, especially when we're planning for Vacation Bible School. (Thank you, Harriet Hayes and Abby Larson, for leading crafts this year.) Abby enjoys crafting and I love spending time with her, hence the other night in my kitchen.

Abby texted me in the middle of a long day asking if I wanted to make a candle with her that night. *Sure*, I wrote back, time with her. As the long day wore on, I could feel the fatigue settling into my bones. I made it home just before six o'clock to a lovely meal prepared by my husband, Matt, bless him. But the night ahead felt a bit daunting. My son Nate needed to work on some college financial stuff with me, I wanted a walk with Matt, and there was still the candle project looming.

This wasn't just any candle project either. Abby wanted to make a very large candle layered with many of the shells she's collected on beaches and riverbanks. We'd have to position the shells just so, try to hold them as we poured the hot wax, wait for it to dry, and repeat. I prepared myself to grin and bear it, and then I was surprised by joy. Matt helped with some of the initial set up and got us going on a plan, bless him. Then Abby and I worked and talked and laughed. Her delight in the simple pleasures of life is such a blessing to me. It was a holy and renewing time. Surely, the Lord was in that place. God showed up for me in a craft project.

Jacob, too, is surprised by God's presence. Jacob is having a rough time, much rougher than my long day of work. You could argue he'd brought on many of the challenges himself. His twin brother Esau, the first-born twin, is furious with Jacob for good reason. Jacob had persuaded Esau to give up his inheritance. Then Jacob tricked their father Isaac into giving him the blessing that was supposed to go to Esau. Now Esau is raging, and Jacob is on the run in the wilderness, facing unforeseen consequences of his actions. He stumbles upon a certain place that is, really, no particular place. He lands there just because the sun is setting, and he needs to sleep.

There, in a no-man's-land kind of place, far from any religious shrine or temple, God shows up and blesses him. I love that God is present where he least expects it and also that God freely gives him

the very thing he thought he had to connive and finagle, grasp and steal - a blessing. Not only that, God says that through Jacob and his offspring, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

In Jacob's family, there was only one blessing, a blessing for the eldest son. Once Esau and Isaac realize that Jacob has used deceit and trickery to steal the blessing, Esau pleads, "Bless me too father." Isaac says he can't, he's already given the blessing to Jacob. Esau cries, "Haven't you reserved a blessing for me?" This part of the story always puzzles me. Why can't both brothers be blessed? But that wasn't how things worked in that culture. It was a zero-sum game, one person's gain another's loss. One received a blessing, the rest of the siblings did not. Our families and society function differently, but still, zero-sum thinking drives a lot of what we do.

It was driving me that night in the kitchen with the candle, honestly. I wanted to be with Abby and yet I wondered if crafting would take all the energy I had left, leaving me empty. As we juggle demands, roles and commitments in households and families, workplaces, congregations, and communities, it's easy to think that there just isn't enough to go around - not enough time, not enough energy, not enough resources - that your gain is my loss.

Even if we don't resort to deceit and trickery like Jacob, we often think we must hustle and finagle and scheme and plot to make sure we get what we want and need. We're pretty sure that others should only get what's owed them, and that if they've ever played outside the rules, they should pay the price, get what's coming to them.

Yet that's not how things work in God's economy, in the household of God. God had every reason to give Jacob what he deserves - judgment and punishment. Instead, God surprises Jacob with presence and promise and blessing, blessing beyond what he can ask or imagine. God blesses Jacob and shows him he will continue to be blessed in relationships with other people. There is more than enough blessing to go around. The same is true for us.

God blesses us even in this wilderness time for our planet, for our country, even as we face the unforeseen consequences of our actions.

God blesses us even when we deserve judgment and punishment.

God is here, even when we don't know it, even when we can't recognize God's presence.

God is with you and will keep you wherever you go.

God blesses you and all people with more than enough hope and energy and joy and abundance.

That night in my kitchen, I was approaching family life as a zero-sum game. I was surprised by God's presence, surprised by blessing and delight and renewal and the sense that, in God, there is enough.

Where might God meet you and bless you today?

How will that blessing flow through you to others?

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.