

What in the World?!©
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Genesis 27:1-29

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Wouldn't you agree that there are lots of things we hear and see in this world that cause us to be amazed, stunned or puzzled? Things like dinosaurs standing at the curb looking down the road, like he's expecting something. Here is that dinosaur. Kind of makes you want to say – What in the world?!

If we watch the news for even a short amount of time, we are prone to say, “What in the world?”

If we watch our country's politics – so polemic, so angry, so determined to not work together (no matter what side you lean to), it often makes us – or at least me – very puzzled, very frustrated and I do, many times find myself saying, What in the world are they thinking? What in the world?!!!

With the coming of Halloween, we have plenty of costumes – little ones in disguises coming through our doors. Most of them are really cute, but some catch us off-guard and surprise us by the way they look. What in the world?!!

Well, I guess probably this story in Genesis about Jacob dressing up like his brother in order to trick his nearly blind father, Isaac, is about as close to a costume party as we can get, in the Bible.

With the help and encouragement of his mother, Jacob put on his brother's best clothes – clothes that smelled like his brother, Esau, and then he covered his hands and neck with the hair of a young goat so he would feel like his hairy brother, when his father touched him.

It was, of course, to deceive his father. To trick him into giving the blessing that was so important in that time and culture. The blessing given to the first-born son – a blessing that was a positive, encouraging, promising word of life and wholeness and prosperity.

It was a word that meant so much to a son, giving him a sense of identity and self-confidence. It was a very special thing, done as a ritual – similar to our sacraments today.

There is the identification of the son from the father; and the invitation to have a meal that the son prepared; there is the eating of that meal together; then the kiss; and then the blessing. And it almost always happened when the father was at a place in his life where he would not live much longer.

A blessing was very important and meaningful, and it could not be retracted. Because that was the tradition, and tradition was as important as the law to them.

Not long before this happened, Jacob went to his brother, who was out working in the fields, telling him he would give him some of the soup he made if Esau would give him – Jacob – his birthright. This reminds me of my boys when they were growing up. Only in reverse. The

youngest one, Darrick, would do funny things and the oldest, David had a habit of saying, “Darrick. You stupid idiot.

Now, I’m not condoning calling a sibling a derogatory name but really ... Esau was so hungry he traded his inheritance for a bowl of lentil stew. What in the world?!?! Can’t you just hear Jacob, later, laughing at Esau. “Esau! You stupid idiot!”

Why would Esau be so naïve? Giving up his birthright meant giving Jacob all his inheritance. While a blessing was more of a conventional/traditional event, a birthright was a legal transaction. It was the law that the birthright was given to the first- born son, which meant he would get a double portion of what anyone else would inherit. It would be the father’s land and his livestock, his wealth. He would be the head of all that. The boss, so to speak.

And Esau just traded it for a bowl of lentil soup! He didn’t even like a vegan diet. He really loved meat! But he was very hungry and he saw that red stew and gladly traded his inheritance for it. Maybe because it was red, he thought it had meat in it. But it didn’t.

Now Jacob was God’s choice from before he and his twin were born. And these two brothers were fighting each other even in the womb, making their mother, Rebekah, miserable. She asked the Lord why she had to be so uncomfortable. What in the world is going on?

God told her that these boys would always be fighting with each other and that the one who was second would be the ruler over the oldest and he, the youngest, would be the one whom the covenant with Abraham was fulfilled – you know, all those descendants who would pass down the faith. So many, they would be like counting dust particles. Or stars.

The name Esau means Adom – like the first clay baby we call Adam. He looked red like the clay of the earth. And he was hairy. And he loved meat and he obviously wasn’t very bright to trade his birthright.

His name that means Adom also sounds like Edom. Esau eventually became the father of all the nations like Syria – nations that fought then, and still do today – the nation of Israel. (Eventually, before this series is over, we will come to hear that God changed Jacob’s name to Israel).

But for now, Jacob is his name and it means, Deceiver, Trickster, one who holds on to the heels of another (as in the heels of his twin brother, taking a free ride through the birth canal.)

So, God chooses Jacob the deceiver, the trickster, to continue fulfilling the covenant promise made to Abraham (Jacob’s grandfather). A promise to give land and many descendants; a promise to be their God and that all those descendants would be God’s people. It was Jacob who was chosen – not the first one to come into the world, but the one who was clinging to the heel of the first born.

By all rights – legally and traditionally – Esau should have been the one. But he wasn't. It makes us wonder about God's choices. What in the world?! What in the world was God thinking, choosing such a deceptive, lying cheat?

We are, of course, quick to judge others. It's our nature. We act surprised at how a parent loves a child who is always in trouble as much as she loves the one who seems to always behave.

We are surprised to learn that a girl or a boy who seemed to constantly be rebellious turns out to really make something of themselves; who is an upstanding citizen in the community – doing good things for the well-being of many.

I started to title this sermon – Blessings in Disguise. Like this little dinosaur who seems so out of place and so strange, standing at the curb, across the street from a church, waiting for the ice cream truck to come by – he suddenly turns around and you see his darling face. The face of a true blessing. The face of our beloved grandson, Aiden.

He was definitely a blessing in disguise. Aiden is full of life and energy and can be pretty mischievous too. But he is an adorable blessing as well.

And Jacob, well, he wasn't wearing a dinosaur costume, but he was certainly in disguise. He did receive his father's blessing. A blessing meant for his brother.

There is so much emotion in this, I think. Esau comes back, with the meal he prepared for his father, expecting to receive his blessing, and he wails heartbrokenly at what happened. And he is angry, and Jacob ends up running for his life. Esau still gets to stay and have all the glory of the inheritance. He's still there and Jacob is not.

Jacob will be on the run and he will be deceived, just as he has deceived. And he will wish for a real authentic blessing – one that truly was meant for him.

These are the questions to think about:

What in the world is God thinking, making the choices He does?

What does this say about Jacob and humans in general? About us?

And what does this say about God?

We may think we are much better than Jacob. We would never deceive our father or cheat our brother. Would we? But what would we do? What have we done that really is just as ornery and deceptive as Jacob? What do we do to get ahead? To promote ourselves? To have something more? What are the little ways we manipulate things to make them happen?

Thing is, the bible tells us that sin is sin – regardless of what it is; no matter how big or small it is. We are all equally sinners in the eyes of God. We are equal opportunity sinners. My mom used to love to say a funny little toast or cheer:

Here's to you as good as you are

*And here's to me as bad as I am
But as good as you are
And as bad as I am
I'm as good as you are
As bad as I am.*

We are equal opportunity sinners.

And yet – just like God chose Jacob the Deceiver – and David, the adulterer and murderer – and Jonah, the one who ran from God and then pouted when God turned out to be forgiving – and Rahab the prostitute ...

Just like every single character in the bible stories, God loved them, God chose them for His plans and worked out His purpose through them.

God uses real people. And God is still doing that today. In you. And in me. What in the world?!!

We don't understand the ways of God, but God does have a plan and a vision for his Kingdom and we are all a part of that – as good and as bad as we are.

I saw this meme on Facebook and it fit so well I wanted to share it. It says:

*I have given Christ countless reasons not to love me
And none of them changed His mind.*

I thank God for that!

Part of God's plan was to forgive us, to save us from our sin and deception by sending us His Son who gave everything – his perfect life, his blood, his body, so that we can be free of the guilt and burden of sin we carry.

You, my friends, you and I are part of the plan – as human as we are – human like Jacob.

God still chooses today people whom He will use to continue carrying out a plan and a promise He made so long ago. That's why you're here.

What in the world?! What in the world is God doing with us? What in the world are we called to do? What in the world – a world full of confusion and hatred and pain and people who are so lost – what in the world – will you – will we do; what can we do to answer the call?

Looking at Jacob's story, we can be assured that whether we are always good, or sometimes a rascal, God loves us anyway. We are his. Always.

Today is World Communion. It is a day that we remember and celebrate Christians all over our globe. People who are believers – disciples of Jesus Christ – will come to the Table to receive

the meal Jesus gave to remember his Body and his Blood that was given for us who are sinners, but who are redeemed in him.

What in the world?! Christ in the world – through all of us. His plan working in us today.
Amen.

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