

Our study this morning is on the faith of Jacob.

But before we start, there's an image I want to tuck in the back of your minds from 2nd Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 4:7 (NLT)

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

Let's look at why Jacob is listed in this chapter of people with great faith.

Hebrews 11:21 (NLT)

21 It was by faith that Jacob, when he was old and dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons and bowed in worship as he leaned on his staff.

I think for most of us, the Bible presents two Jacobs. We know he was one of the 3 great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We know his 12 sons fathered the 12 tribes of Israel through whom God gives his word and through whom the Messiah is born. Jesus had Jacob's DNA in him. We know God gave him the name Israel and for the 4000 years since then millions upon millions of people have gone by that name as Israelites and now, 4000 years after his death there is a country named after him. It certainly seems like God has honoured this great man.

But there's the second Jacob. The one from the stories. The one we're kind of embarrassed about: the conniving little brother who seems to be out to trick and fool everyone for his own gain.

This morning I'm going to try to bring these 2 Jacob's closer together for us.

We start with his birth in Genesis 25.

Genesis 25:24-34 (NLT)

And when the time came to give birth, Rebekah discovered that she did indeed have twins! The first one was very red at birth and covered with thick hair like a fur coat. So they named him Esau.

His name is a little strange - it seems to do with making or handling. But the idea of him being red sticks out partly because he was a red, healthy baby, partly because he likes red soup and partly because it's the colour of the soil in that region. He becomes known as Edom - Red. Similar to the word Adam which means soil.

Genesis 25:24-34 (NLT)

Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel. So they named him Jacob.

There's no question what this name means: heal-grabber. Now let me correct that. His name doesn't mean 'heal-grabber'. His name IS "heal-grabber."

So around the tents you'd hear: Heal-grabber, dinner time. Anyone seen Heal-grabber? I'd like you to meet my two sons: Big Red and Healgrabber.

It seems like the destiny of these two men is decided at their naming ceremony.

Genesis 25:24-34 (NLT)

Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born.

As the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter. He was an outdoorsman, but Jacob had a quiet temperament, preferring to stay at home. Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the wild game Esau brought home, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Big Red was a man's man.

Healgrabber was ... Big Red's brother.

Big Red's world was out there - the wilds.

Healgrabber's world was the home and the family. But what family? What about that family?

There's no question in my mind that these boys grew up learning all about their family.

Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born and lived to 175. Isaac was 60 when the twins were born.

So Big Red and Healgrabber would have known Grandpa Abraham for the first 15 years of their lives.

They would have know that God had spoken to Grandpa Abraham and Daddy Issac.

They would have know that God had called them out from all the families and nations of the earth.

They would have know that God had promised that through them all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Knowing God and blessing the world: that was the family business.

And Big Red was the perfect man to carry on the family business: strong, popular, tough, smart. The problem was he didn't care about the family.

Healgrabber was the most unlikely character to carry on the family business. He was a momma's boy with a bad name and little experience outside their own home.

But he was all about the family.

Genesis 25:24-34 (NLT)

One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived home from the wilderness exhausted and hungry. Esau said to Jacob, "I'm starved! Give me some of that red stew!" (This is how Esau got his other name, Edom, which means "red.")

"All right," Jacob replied, "but trade me your rights as the firstborn son."

Big Red's motives are often given to us. We read stories in which he intentionally offends his parents repeatedly, he seeks to kill his brother. But it's easy to fall into Issac's blindness and still prefer him over Healgrabber.

We read very little about Healgrabber's motives in any passage. Almost nothing. We're left to make assumptions and we really can't get past his name and reputation.

But this morning I want to challenge you to look deeper into this story.

Healgrabber grew up in Big Red's shadow. Based on the culture and the family dynamics it is obvious that Big Red has the right stuff to lead this family into the next generation.

But does he want the Job?

This is the family that is called by God to stand above the nations.
Does Big Red want to job?

So one day Big Red comes back from hunting. He's made his bow, his arrows. Made a knife.
Been off hunting but no game today.

Healgrabber comes out of the tent, wiping his hands on a dish towel, wearing a frilly apron. He's been busy too. He has made a pot of boiling water with things floating in it. He made soup.

Big Red gives him a nuggie and says, "give me soup".

Healgrabber gives him much more. He gives him a test.

He makes him choose between, on one hand, his rights as the firstborn son: the privilege and responsibility of leading this family called by God, of living up to the faith of Abraham and the faith of Isaac, to become the next patriarch through whom God would bless all nations AS THE WORD OF GOD HAS SAID (WILL YOU LIVE UP TO THE WORD OF GOD?)

- and on the other hand a bowl of soup.

Nothing in the story leads us to think that Healgrabber has any desire or ambition to take over the family business but somebody has to and there's only two of them. If Big Red doesn't want to then Healgrabber will have to whether he wants to or not.

Genesis 25:24-34 (NLT)

*"Look, I'm dying of starvation!" said Esau. {Drama Queen} "What good is my birthright *to me* now?"*

But Jacob said, "First you must swear that your birthright is mine." So Esau swore an oath, thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his brother, Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate the meal, then got up and left. He showed contempt for his rights as the firstborn.

Big Red fails the test.

But Healgrabber is not going to let Isaac down,
he's not going to let Abraham down,
He's not going to let GOD down.

And now he has to take on a task for which NO ONE thinks he's suited.

But he will do his best for the family and for God

Now we fast forward many years.

Genesis 27 (NLT)

One day when Isaac was old and turning blind, he called for Esau, his older son, and said, "My son."

"Yes, Father?" Esau replied.

"I am an old man now," Isaac said, "and I don't know when I may die. Take your bow and a quiver full of arrows, and go out into the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare

my favorite dish, and bring it here for me to eat. Then I will pronounce the blessing that belongs to you, my firstborn son, before I die."

But Rebekah overheard what Isaac had said to his son Esau.

Scripture presents Rebekah as an amazing woman of faith and strength. Let's be very careful about painting her as underhandedly betraying her husband in one of her last acts as his wife.

Healgrabber is committed to this family and to the word of God.

Rebekah is committed to this family and to the word of God.

They are under no illusion that Big Red appears perfectly suited to take over the family business but doesn't want to and so it has fallen on Healgrabber but Healgrabber is going to need all the help he can get - in order to carry the responsibilities of the first-born he's going to need the blessing of the first born.

And so they hatch a plot.

Isaac is blind. Also his eyes don't work. He's blinded by his love for Big Red and he has failed to see what is happening in his own family and what will become of his descendants and the role they have been given by God.

When Rebekah and Healgrabber take advantage of Isaac's blindness, they are in fact saving him from making a disastrous decision caused by his blindness.

They make sure that Isaac does what Isaac would choose to do if he really understood what was going on.

They kill a goat, cook it up.

They take the goat skin and wrap it around Healgrabber's arms and neck, covering his baby-soft skin.

And Isaac gives him the blessing of the first born. Big Red finds out and decides to kill Healgrabber. That's how he wants to lead God's chosen family, killing the only other male.

I don't think Healgrabber was under any illusion about his adequacy to handle the task that God had set for them.

But he was willing to ignore the odds, ignore what was obvious to everyone else and cling to the word of God, and use whatever he had to uphold the word of God.

Many years have passed and in Genesis 48 we find the story that Hebrews 11 refers to.

Healgrabber is an old man. Nothing in his life as gone the way it was supposed to. He wasn't suited to take over the family business but his brother wouldn't so he had to. He ran away when his brother tried to kill him. He fell in love with a beautiful girl and got tricked into marrying her sister. His kids were murderers and even turned on each other. The land of promise became a land of famine. Nothing has turned out the way it was supposed and even HE hasn't become the great man he should have, but whatever he had, whatever broken piece of his life he could muster together he would use to serve God.

And God used Healgrabber

Despite his reputation, his obvious lack of gifts, his questionable choices - he served God.

And now we find him living in Egypt. He's bout to die. He wants to bless his 2 grandsons, the sons of Joseph. Joseph brings them in and he put his oldest son Manasseh by his dad's right hand and his younger son Ephraim by his dad's left hand so the oldest would get the greater blessing. But as Healgrabber is reaching out he crosses his arms and gives the youngest son the greater blessing. Joseph sees it and says, "Dad, that's not how it's supposed to be." Healgrabber smiles and says, "I know. Let's see what God can do with it."

Throughout scripture we see God taking bad situations and broken people and using them to accomplish His plans.

We see this through Jesus' life and ministry.

Mark 2:13-17 (NLT)

Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that were coming to him. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

It was normal for a rabbi to call disciples. In the days before electricity and printing presses the is how they got their message out. The disciple would become a copy, an image of his master. So you could get to know a rabbi well based on the people he called as disciples.

But a rabbi calling a tax collector would be like the Canucks drafting me to play on their first line.

Mark 2:13-17 (NLT)

Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.) But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"

When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

Israeli society at the time was divided into two main groups.

One was the ultra religious. They were very much aware that only a few hundred years earlier their relatives had been dragged off into captivity and their cities and temple had been destroyed and they all knew why. They had not based their lives on the word of God. This group wanted to make sure that did not happen again. Their passion was too see everyone applying the word of God in every corner of their lives to avoid the sufferings of past generations. And they believed if they could get everyone living according to God's law then finally they would be worthy of the Messiah that God had promised. The ultra religious group - for the sake of the nation and future generations.

The other main group were the not-so-religious. For them being a Jew had more to do with culture than God. They observed the festivals, kept the laws and read the passages that made them feel good. They were called “sinners” but the term was rarely an insult. It would be like terms we use today: secular, non-practicing, nominal.

So we have the ultra religious people - those trying too hard.
And we have the sinners - those who gave up trying a long time ago.

Mark 2:13-17 (NLT)

The translators of the NLT have added some punch to remind is of the tensions that often existed between these two groups.

But if we boil it down we see that these terms:

- other disreputable sinners
- other sinners
- such scum

are translation of one simple word: sinners.

While the two groups coexisted there would often be conflict that could be as simple as kidding each other on the street or as serious as violence.

But lets look into what’s really happening in Levi’s house.

Because the ultra religious were so hungry for a messiah, they had a standard operating procedure. When they heard rumours of the messiah coming they would send a committee of scribes - older translations called them lawyers because the were specialists in the law and prophets. They were like teams of investigators who knew exactly what the messiah should do and say. So they would follow the person claiming to be messiah. They’d watch them and ask questions and then report back to the Sanhedrin. Here we see Jesus is calling disciples. Thats important. A tax collector. That’s sick and twisted. They keep following, scribbling notes. Now he’s having dinner with sinners - non-observant Jews. That can be a problem. The messiah should obey the law, including the parts of the law that deal with ceremonial cleanliness and clean and unclean food. When an observant Jew eats with a non-observant Jew in the non-observant Jew’s house it’s hard to be sure if the dishes ave been washed according to Moses, if the meat has been slaughtered according to Moses. It’s tricky and most leaders will just avoid doing it. It’s not easy to understand. In fact it’s so difficult to understand that even Peter, after he had been a Church leaders for 20 years was still wrestling with it. So we don’t fault these men for asking the same question. And notice, they don’t confront Jesus, the ask the disciples. They’re not trying to make a scene. They just need to know how to describe it in their report. But Jesus overhears the question and as is often the case he answers the deeper question they haven’t asked yet. Why would he call a tax collector as a disciple? Why would he treat sinners as his equals in the eyes of God. It’s hard to understand.

They have spent their entire lives on this mission of saving Israel from disaster, of making Israel worthy of the Messiah. They see everyone as being wither with them of against them in this mission. According to what they’ve been taught the Messiah should recognize that but it doesn’t seem to be important to Jesus and they need to try to figure out why.

So they ask, “Why does he eat with sinners.” How does this work.

Jesus answers this by saying, "I've come to call the sick not the healthy."

Now, among the sinners there would many who not classify themselves as sick. They're doing perfectly fine thank you very much. But there would be a few who would say: This isn't working. This is not how my life was supposed to turn out. If you can help me I will follow you.

And we find the exact same thing with ultra religious. There would be a few who would say: I've been obeying the laws my whole life, I know the basis of the law is that I love God with all my heart mind and soul. I've been obeying God but I'm not feeling the love. There's a piece missing and I think it's me. If you can help me I will follow you.

Jesus doesn't work through people because they're trying to be healthy. He works through people who are willing to admit they're sick.

Our lives have not turned out the way they were supposed. There has been pain and misunderstandings and accusations and time wasted and failure. But we have a choice. We can keep trying really really hard and hope that God only sees the healthy parts or we can admit we're sick and can do nothing without him.

The story of Jacob is the wrong guy in the wrong place at the wrong time and he knew it. But he took all those broken pieces and he clung to the word of God. He wrestled with God.

2 Corinthians 4:7 New Living Translation (NLT)

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

We are jars of clay. That's an insult. We may not be golden bowls, or silver tea sets or Ming dynasty vases but come on God. Can't we at least be Corningware - ugly but tough. Can't we be Tupperware - don't microwave it but it still has many uses.

No. We are brittle, breakable, and temporary and we need to admit it. Because we have had amazing treasure placed in us and if we are too concerned with the kind of bowl we are we may block people from seeing our contents.

We are called to be people of faith. Genesis to Revelation that's what God is looking for.

But we don't put faith in our strengths, or our gifts, we don't put faith in our growth or our reputation. We don't put faith in having the right doctrines and owning the right books. All of those have their value and place in our lives but we don't trust them, we don't put our faith in them or any good thing. Our faith is in the living God. And it is only what He places in us that gives us our value and purpose.

We are called to be simple jars of clay - that He will use to carry His word, His love, His hope, His joy, His Spirit, His Son into a sick and hurting world. And all that we have to offer, is HIM.

We are called to join the family business. God's family business is the love the world so much that we lay down our lives to bring salvation, to bring Jesus to those who need him. He could do it better without us, but he invites us to join him because he loves us, we're his kids. And even if we are just jars of clay, he's willing to die for us and he's willing to solve through us.

And a prerequisite of having Him use us in this way is admitting we're sick, our lives have not turned out the way they should, we have not become the people we should be. Knowing that is the open door he's looking for.