



“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God” writes Paul in his letter to the Romans. Ahead even, we learn in Genesis with the story of Jacob, for those who do wrong, who cheat and deceive. And that gets my goat! It’s not fair that someone who deceives ends up being blessed by God is it? And we are reminded that God’s ways are not always our ways – and during this lifetime we may never know why somethings happen the way they do.

One of my pet peeves is when the people who put together our Lectionary – the sequence of readings that we read on Sundays skip, seemingly willy-nilly, over stories that are important to the context of a subsequent reading. We experience that today when they skip from Genesis 25 to Genesis 28 and then we read only part of chapter 28 and skip into chapter 29. The reason for my displeasure is that the parts we don’t read are really important to understanding what we are reading. Most especially left out is chapter 27 –

when Jacob deceives his father Isaac over the blessing that belongs to the older son. Esau is the older son and Jacob the younger. A father blessed his older son who was expected to continue the lineage and was expected to care for all younger siblings. This blessing included a double share of the land among other things. A father’s blessing was important to how society functioned.

Jacob knew this and yet he ignored protocol to seize the blessing- which could be given only once- to grab more than was his due. Well, as you might imagine, when Esau learned that Jacob had tricked him, Esau was enraged and threatened to kill Jacob after his father, Isaac, was dead.

Jacob learned of this threat and following the instructions of his mother and father, goes off to find a wife from Laban, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob and Esau’s mother. Along the way we get the story of Jacob’s dream of angels ascending and descending the ladder and subsequently the establishment of Beth-el, the place where God appeared to Jacob. The place where God makes a promise to Jacob that Jacob’s descendants shall be like the dust- spread throughout the world. Jacob responds, in part, by promising to God one-tenth of all that is given to Jacob- in other words, a tithe. A tithe is thus our standard for giving to God.

Today’s reading brings us forward to the time that Jacob has spent with Laban. Laban has told Jacob that Laban’s daughter Rachel would be Jacob’s bride if Jacob worked for Laban for 7 years. Jacob did- but then Laban deceived Jacob on his wedding night by substituting Leah, his oldest daughter, for Rachel, his younger daughter. Don’t you have to laugh at the deceiver becomes the deceived? A bit of justice and come-uppance for one who got to this place by grabbing what was not his.

When Jacob complains, Laban says, in our culture the older must marry before the younger. Leah must marry before Rachel can. But, says Laban, if you will work another 7 years for me, I will give you Rachel. And so Jacob does and he gets Rachel for his second wife. Dedication, perseverance, commitment. Jacob knew what he wanted and was willing to work for it. Seems like quite a switch from deceiving his older brother, Esau, first to get the birthright and secondly to get his father's blessing. Something happened that night in the desert and the dream of angels ascending and descending the ladder. Something happened when Jacob recognized that God was in that place and Jacob acknowledged God's presence by naming the place Beth-el, which translates as "house of God." Jacob turned his life around. "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God."

Sometimes, though, we don't know what the good is. Or, we define good differently than what we see being lived out. Or, seeing the good can take years. We are not in control- God is. God calls us to be faithful, to trust, even when we can't see the way forward or we don't like the way forward. God loves us and wants the best for us even when we are the deceivers or when we fail to trust God.

Reinhold Niebuhr is credited with writing The Serenity Prayer, which in its entirety is as follows:

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
forever in the next. Amen.¹

Good advice. It's not always easy but the benefits of trusting God to have our best interests at heart means accepting that we are not in control and we are not responsible for everything. It can be freeing to "let go and let God." Acknowledge our own part in our life's circumstances but don't go overboard and take responsibility for things that truly are out of your control. Keep your focus on God and living a life that loves God and loves neighbor. God will do God's part when we do our part, even if sometimes we have deceived. Turn around, acknowledge your faults and turn back to God, who loves you and is waiting for your trust and your love. **Amen.**

¹ <http://www.beliefnet.com/prayers/protestant/addiction/serenity-prayer.aspx#ojMApAukLqwFDzsA.99> (July 21, 2017)