

**New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio**



Esau selling his birthright to Jacob for lentil stew

**A Sermon for the 7th Sunday after Pentecost
July 12, 2026**

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[Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Genesis 25, Matthew 13

Sibling rivalry vs sowing good will

We have two big parables in our readings today, and one seems to answer the other.

In our continuing Old Testament story of the genealogy of God's people, Isaac and Rebekah have twin sons who apparently are fighting all the time, even before they are born. When twins are born, one proceeds the other in birth order, and Esau is the first. As the twins grow older, Jacob, also known as Jacob the rascal, is tricky and devises a way to be counted as first, to claim the birthright despite his being born second. He waits until his brother Esau is nearly starving and will give anything for that lentil soup. Aha! Esau gives away his birthright for a bowl of soup! And then he pulls another trick, just to be sure. Jacob wins the prize of his father's blessing by sneaky means. The boys have different body textures – Esau is rather hairy, and Jacob is not, so Jacob disguises himself by putting something hairy on his arms. Jacob approaches Isaac, his nearly-blind father, for the blessing. Isaac feels the hairy arms, and Isaac is fooled into thinking this is Esau. Jacob gets the birthright twice – first from famished Esau and second from his deceived father. Jacob is a tricky guy.

This story probably reflects inter-fighting of the Jewish people early in their existence, for instance the two rival ways of life: hunting and sheepherding. Esau is described as a hunter; Jacob stays home and follows his father's sheepherding. This contrast of lifestyles is expressed as a story of sibling rivalry. It is also a story-telling device to make sure Jacob is the genealogical winner.

Many centuries later, Jesus tells another parable that seems to respond to the trickery of his ancestors' story. Jesus preaches the famous Parable of the Sower, telling of four different responses to receiving God's Word. Three of the responses are fruitless, but one response favors the growing of God's Word among believers.

You know this famous parable. Jesus even explains it to his followers so we don't miss the point and think it is just about gardening.

The Sower casts seed upon the ground. That's God, generously casting the Word everywhere. The seed falls in four places: first, the seed falls on the path and birds eat it up. Second, some seed falls on rocky ground without much soil, and springs up but dies quickly. Third, seed falls among thorns that choke the growth. Fourth, some seed falls on good earth and it grows and thrives. Who are we in this parable? The dirt? Maybe, but what matters are the results: the fourth case represents those who hear the word and understand it and bear fruit.

There are lots of ways for us to bear fruit. One is to do some casting of seed ourselves, that we sow good will with our lives. We hear God's word and try to do good in our relationships and in the world.

If we live in an honest and generous way, we could be a corrective to Jacob's action against his brother Esau. I assure you that Esau was not happy to be displaced in the birth order, and Jacob was well aware that his trickery was dishonest. There's an old sing-song version of this story, ("I saw Esau sitting on the seesaw," that describes Jacob knocking his brother off the seesaw over a love spat, but the result is the same: Esau is displaced.) Jacob was so worried about retribution from Esau that he ran away from home. In the next three weeks of readings, we will hear about his journey.

What I hear in these two parables is that God loves God's people, no exceptions. Tricky Jacob has a rocky course but ultimately is a part of the story of God's salvation. Jesus knows that not everyone is going to respond to the love of God, but that love is offered to everyone nevertheless.

As we look back over our own lives, we can probably find instances that parallel these teachings. Perhaps you experienced sibling rivalry, perhaps you needed to leave home to redirect your course, perhaps you have something in your background that is a bit unsavory that you regret. Our Bible stories and parables are instructional and help us with our lives at all stages of our own stories. Many of us are older than average now, and some of us are evaluating where we have come from. With a little insight, perhaps we can see where God has been active in our lives all the way.