

# **Beds are burning**

**Genesis 25:19-34 & Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23**

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Esau and Jacob were twins but not identical. Esau was born first – first born, inheritor of the blessing from his father Isaac, inheritor of land and title, he was hairy, strong and good at hunting and pleased his father greatly. Jacob was born second, apparently born hanging on to the heel of his brother, which would have made for a difficult delivery for all concerned in anyone's time. Jacob was smooth-skinned, lean and an indoors type, the apple of his mother Rebekah's eye. We can only imagine the scenes as they were growing up. Here we are given one scene in particular. As young men, Esau comes in from hunting, smells something cooking and is fainting with hunger. Jacob seizes the opportunity, senses the absolute power he holds in his stewpot and trades his brother a serve of lentil stew for Esau's birthright. Having successfully made that transaction Jacob and his mother carry out stage two of the plan and use some hairy animal skin to fool the failing, fading Isaac into thinking Jacob is Esau and giving the second son the blessing due to the first. When Esau discovers what has happened, Rebekah advises Jacob to flee for his life, so he does and the story unfolds into more stories...

This is a tale of our ancestors, our ancestors in faith - Father Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (note - not Esau) and our ancestors in country. It's about power and dispossession, about birthright and envy, greed and hunger. Our Yolngu brothers and sisters from Arnhem Land told us clearly that we came and took away their birthright and that of all the Indigenous people of this place. We came and claimed the 'uninhabited' land, terra nullius, for the Crown and cheated them out of the blessing that they had with land and language and law and life. But we didn't run away, we're still here and the story unfolds into more stories... When I hear Midnight Oil's song I remember Jacob, many years later struggling with sleep, tormented, wrestling with what he has done –

How can we dance  
When our earth is turning  
How do we sleep  
While our beds are burning? ...

Let's jump from there into the gospel story –

Jesus can't hold a conversation with the crowd that is gathered around him on the beach so he talks to them from a boat. He tells him a story about a farmer who went to scatter seed, just like he is scattering words. Jesus knows that some of his words will fall like seed on ground that is inhospitable and be lost to birds and the breeze. Some of the people in the crowd will be too busy, too distracted by yesterday or tomorrow and not pay attention to the 'now' of today and they will miss the message. Jesus knows that – but he keeps spreading the seeds, keeps telling the stories, keeps on speaking the word. Some of the seeds of Jesus' teaching will fall into good soil, but they will grow up amongst weeds – people will hear and take in the teaching, but will not be able to weed out greed, fear, self obsession and judgement of others and these things will choke the good grain before it can come to harvest. Jesus knows that – but he keeps spreading the seeds, keeps telling the stories, keeps on speaking the word. Some what he says will fall into open ears and take hold in ready hearts that are filled with good soil and the gospel will grow, flourish and reap a hundred-fold. I've seen that, so have you. We are people who have been changed, rescued and blessed beyond our understanding by hearing the gospel and letting it into our lives. But God knows, and we know that we can still be shallow and thorny and mean. God knows that – but God keeps spreading the seeds, keeps telling the stories, keeps on spreading the Living Word, through us or despite us, and allows the weeds to flourish in our midst.

The Yolngu people of Arnhem Land talk about the time when the gospel spread like wildfire through their communities, bringing life through the Church Missions, bringing stories that connected deeply with the Spirit of the Land, the Creator Spirit that was here long before the white folk came. They talk about it as a time of life and growth and hope, a movement of the Spirit in and of this land. Jesus' story of The Sower reminds us about the outrageous abundance and generosity of the giver of life. It reminds us that, despite our struggles and our hardness and our refusal to listen, good grows all around us and we are always invited to participate, to join in the dance.

Jesus' words from the boat split the crowd because faith is more than crowd belief. We can and we must encourage each other to grow in Christ, but it's up to each of us to explore our own hearts and to ensure that they contain good soil. We pray that God will create the right conditions with us, as followers of Jesus and together as the body of Christ so that good may grow and flourish.

As for Jacob and our First Peoples, God does away with our need to use and abuse power by casting seeds far and wide, regardless of cost or consequence. God's blessing is for us all, so is God's forgiveness and call to reconciliation. So we'll listen and pray and study and listen, and we'll continue the story next week.

Here are some questions to ponder, and to chat about with God – and share with me if you would like to:

- What has God been planting in your heart lately?
- Are there important ideas or learnings that have been planted in your heart but have been choked or abandoned in the forgetting of time? If so, what needs to happen for them to be reclaimed?
- What does your heart need now to be good soil for the growing of the gospel?
- What goodness do you see being planted in our church? How do we nurture and nourish that seed of hope? What might threaten or strangle it and what might we do about that?

Blessings through Christ who scatters the seed and calls us all into life,

Rev. Jennie Gordon , Minister, Yarra Valley Parish. 0416 152051