

We enter our fourth week in the book of Genesis. Thus far we have seen how God, out of His love and mercy, created us in the image of the holy and undivided Trinity; resulting in the necessity that each of us view one another with the same love and dignity that God has shown us. In our second week, we examined the difficult notion of sacrifice in the story of Abraham and Isaac. This reminded us that all that we have from God is a gift. Our sacrifice is giving back to God what has always been His. And last week, through the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, we heard how God continues the process of fulfilling his covenant with Abraham: a covenant that you and I continue to be a part of today. So we continue to march on this week, taking a closer look at Isaac's children: Jacob and Esau. Jacob is the immediate ancestor of the people of Israel. He is, in this sense, the embodiment of the people as a whole, a national hero if you will. Yet, in reading our lesson for today, one can't help but to be a little disturbed by Jacob's behavior, particularly with regard to his brother Esau. Esau comes off looking a little bit like a fall guy in our story. On the surface it looks like Jacob is kind of sneaky, an opportunist. None of Jacob's plotting and scheming seemed like the type of behavior, we would expect from the founder of God's people, Israel. However, when we dig deeper into our story, things begin to look a bit more complex. The first thing we must notice, is how the author describes both of the young men. We are told that Esau was a "skilled-hunter." I imagine Esau as a combination of a mountain man, linebacker, prize fighter, and the Terminator. He would have gone out into the wilderness, in all his manliness, killed animals, slung them over his shoulder walked the miles back home, to proudly throw the defeated prey onto the table. At which point he probably grabbed a beer --most certainly not a light beer! --plopped himself down on the couch, kicked his feet up, smoked a cigar, and fell asleep watching an old John Wayne film. The next morning Esau would probably wake up, go down stairs, work on his Camaro, go get in a fist fight over a girl, and then go back out to the hunt. This is who Esau was: a man's man. Jacob on the other hand... We are told Jacob was a "quiet man." Jacob was the guy in chess club in high school, went to an ivy league college, was in an academic society, smoked a pipe and drank sherry while reading Homer and Tennyson. Jacob probably dated girls named Constance, Muffy and Eleanor, and his idea of a fight was going on a fox hunt. This is who Jacob was... a cosmopolitan kind of guy. In the ancient world, the title of "quiet-man" meant that someone was discerning, intuitive and contemplative. The fact that Genesis tells us that Jacob "dwelt in Tents" means that he was likely a teacher of students. These are important details to keep in mind when we look at this story, because they open up new levels of meaning for us. But we should also be asking a couple of important questions. If Esau was such a "skilled-hunter," than why wasn't he able to catch some food to cook while he was out in the field? Is it possible that the author of Genesis is trying to tell us that sometimes, we can forget what our gifts from God are? And that we forget our gifts to the point that we aren't able to contribute to the life of the community? Each of us has gifts that God has given us; for some it is teaching, for others it is music, and for some, it is the gift of listening to those who are hurting. But what happens sometimes, is we forget about the abundance of gifts God has given each of us, and we become stagnant. Every week I spend time preparing to write my sermons. I read the scriptures, I study theology and history, and I pray... all in the hopes that I can show how God's words are still relevant to us today. What would happen if I started to take this for

granted, and began to go through the motions? Not only would you all suffer because you would not hear life-giving sermons, and I sure hope I preach life-giving sermons!, but I would suffer as well. I would suffer because when God plants something in us, we must constantly nurture it, watering it and tilling it like a plant. When we don't do this, that gift from God will wither and die from neglect. And when that happens, a little piece of us dies with it, because we were created in the image of God. When we aren't using the gifts God has given us, it is an indictment on our willingness to trust God, and to be grateful for those talents he has given us. But what causes us to do this? I can't help but think that it stems from a place of pride. When we struggle with pride, we think that all the gifts that we have, came from something that we did, or earned, or taught ourselves, as opposed to something God has done for us. Pride means that we put ourselves above God, and our neighbor. When we allow pride to run our lives, we take more and more for granted what God has given us. This leads us to the next part of our story today; Esau's giving away of his birthright. Now, what is a birthright? In the ancient world each son in a family would be granted an equal portion of his fathers estate; however, the first-born son was granted a double-portion; this extra part was called his birthright. The son who laid claim to this birthright was put in charge of the father's land-holdings, crops, cattle, sheep etc. He also was responsible for taking care of the younger children, especially the girls. Being the first-born brought a lot of challenges, but it also was a position of honor and great esteem. So when Jacob asks Esau for his birthright, he is not taking Esau's entire inheritance, just the second portion, thus indicating that he desired to become the important, more responsible, son. Even though it appears that Jacob was manipulative, and ungracious, let us not forget the bible tells us that Esau "despised his birthright." Think about that! To despise something in the original language, means to give it away without regard to its worth...to take it for granted, or to view it with contempt. It is clear that Esau was not in the least bit worried about giving away his birthright, that thing that, in the ancient world, would have been so important. We are told in the New Testament, that you and I are now the ones in line to receive the inheritance, from our heavenly father.

Eph. 1:7-11

Col. 1:11-12, 3:23-24 The biblical understanding of inheritance and birthright, shows us that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, you and I have been given this tremendous gift. To receive all the joys and blessings that come from being in intimate relationship with Him. I have met with a couple of parishioners this week, and heard a few stories that made me think of today's reading. I couldn't help but see how they had not despised their birthrights, but instead cherished them, and pursued them with passion. The first was a young man who told me how he can look back over the course of his life, and see how God has worked in everyday occurrences to bless and guide him. He also told me about the amazing gifts and talents God has given Him, and instead of bowing to the temptation to take those gifts for granted and, in a sense, despise them, he has pursued his inheritance, and is continually practicing in order to be a wise steward of his birthright as a child of God. The other parishioner I spoke with was St. Roger. Roger came over to dinner the other night and we spent the night telling stories, and sharing about our past and our own birthrights. Roger was waxing poetically about his time in the Airforce and specifically, about the first time he sat in the cockpit after being promoted to the head pilot, looked down the two mile long runway,

felt the power of the engines, and took off. As Roger told this story he teared up, with such joy and passion, I could not help but think that Roger knew what it meant not to despise his birthright. However, we also have the option to be like Esau, and despise our inheritance. When we realize God has bestowed upon us talents, gifts and a passion for life, we must not ever take them for granted, and become flippant with the gifts God has given us. All week as I have been thinking about this passage of scripture, I have been reminded of one of my favorite movies of all time, Braveheart. There is this great scene where Mel Gibson's character William Wallace, tells his fellow countrymen in pursuit of freedom from the English, You're so concerned with squabbling for the scraps from Longshank's table that you've missed your God given right to something better. And compare this with our prayer of humble access which we will pray together in just a moment before we receive communion: We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. When we despise the inheritance given to us by our Heavenly Father, we are left fight over the scraps under the table; such as just trying to get through each day without any joy or passion, When we realize that God has called us and made us worthy, to eat the crumbs under His table, we will discover that through Christ, we are helped up off the floor and given a seat at the head of God's banqueting table. Amen.