

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Genesis 25:19-34

NRSV

Abraham has taken another wife, Keturah, who has borne him sons; they found the Arabic tribes (vv. 2-4). He sends these sons eastward: they will not compete with Isaac (v. 6). Abraham has died (vv. 7-10). Ishmael, his son by Hagar, has twelve sons who become the fathers of tribes between Egypt and Arabia (vv. 12-18). Now vv. 19-20 recall Isaac's Aramean lineage. The story implies that Rebekah was barren for 19 years: see vv. 20 and 26. Isaac, mostly shown as a bridge between Abraham and Jacob, prays for her to conceive (v. 21), but when the pregnancy proves difficult, it is she who visits a shrine, seeking a divine oracle ("inquire of the Lord", v. 22). Contrary to Israelite custom, "the elder shall serve the younger" (v. 23). A scholar suggests that Esau is *ruddy* rather than "red" (v. 25). His abundance of body hair is important later when Isaac is fooled into blessing Jacob rather than Esau. The Hebrew for "hairy" (*se'ir*) reminds the reader of Seir, the land where Esau later lives. "Jacob" (v. 26) probably means *May God protect*. Within the name is a syllable which on its own means "heel". The two boys are indeed "divided" (v. 23) as God has foretold: Esau, like Ishmael, becomes nomadic while Jacob lives a settled life ("living in tents", v. 27).

Vv. 29-34 are a second story. Jacob may well be *cooking up* a stew, i.e. stirring up trouble. When Esau returns from hunting "famished" and weary, he wants to *gulp down* whatever Jacob is cooking. ("Edom", v. 30, meaning *red one*, is another name for Seir). But Jacob thinks fast, to his own advantage; he demands Esau's favoured status (and greater inheritance) as first-born. Esau will give anything for a meal (v. 32). So Jacob is able to extract from him a legal agreement (v. 33). And so we learn how Abraham's line, the line of God's people, continues through Jacob and not Esau, and how Israel became a greater power than Edom. God chooses; whom he chooses is his affair.

Psalms 119:105-112

NRSV

This is the longest of the psalms, being made up of 22 8-line stanzas. Our reading is the fourteenth; in Hebrew, each line begins with the letter *nun*, the fourteenth letter in the alphabet. This stanza, as do the others, talks about the Law. It is called by several names: "word" (vv. 105, 107), "ordinances" (vv. 106, 108), "law" (v. 109), "precepts" (v. 110), "decrees" (v. 111) and "statutes" (v. 112). Perhaps the dominant idea in this stanza is standing up against "the wicked" (v. 110), those who oppose God's ways. The *affliction* in v. 107 may be insults and innuendos the ungodly hurl at the psalmist, as they plot, lay *snares*, against him. His very life, in which he holds God in awe, is at risk (v. 109). The Law is his guide to living (v. 105). He uses all his faculties, both intellectual and emotional ("heart", v. 112) to keep the Law, living up to the "oath" (v. 106) he has "sworn" (v. 106) to keep it.

The Law comes to him as a "heritage" (v. 111) from his forebears, to be lived throughout his life.

Romans 8:1-11

NRSV

Paul has written of the inner conflict which arises within the believer. Whether an adherent to the Law or a Christian, one wills to follow God's ways, but somehow one does otherwise. Something within one causes one not to follow through from "mind" (v. 6) to action. One's body, one's "flesh", seems naturally inclined to do evil. Paul has thanked God for rescuing us from this state: for we who are incorporated "in Christ Jesus" (v. 1) there are no dire consequences ("condemnation") of our mistakes. Why? Because God's "Spirit" (v. 2), in the new way of being, has freed us from the finality of physical death. God has overcome our inclination to sin by lovingly "sending his own Son" (v. 3): he who suffered the effects of human sin in order to do away with it through rising again, thus enabling us to attain oneness with God (v. 4).

There are two *mindsets* (vv. 5-6): one self-oriented and the other Spirit-oriented, one leading to the finality of "death", and one to spiritual "life". Self-orientation is inherently in opposition to God (v. 7). But Christians are motivated by the Spirit (dwells", v. 9), belong to God. "Spirit" and "Christ" come together. Vv. 10-11 say: if Christ (or the Spirit) is in you, though you may be a corpse because of all the wrong you have done, you are actually very much alive – because of the Spirit. If God's Spirit is in you, God will resuscitate your bodies (from being corpses) through the Spirit, in raising you to new life at the end of time.

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

NRSV

The crowd that has come to hear Jesus is so large that he teaches from a boat on the Sea of Galilee. He tells several parables; the first one (vv. 3b-8) he explains in vv. 18-23, but only partially. People were familiar with Palestinian farming; sometimes seeding preceded ploughing. The "sower" (v. 3) and the seed are constant; where it lands varies: in three unfruitful places ("on the path", v. 4, among rocks, v. 5, "among thorns", v. 7) and in one fruitful place (v. 8). V. 9 tells us (and the crowd) that this is a story with a deeper meaning.

People naturally thought of the sower as God and the various soils as the people of the world; knowing the prophecy of the fate of Jeroboam's household in 1 Kings, they probably linked "birds" (v. 4) with evil. Perhaps here the sower is anyone who tells the good news. Growth represents receptivity. While Jesus has invited listening (v. 9), *understanding* (vv. 19, 23) is required in order to be fruitful: reflect on Jesus' message. Those who brush off the message are seduced by evil (v. 19). Vv. 20-21 also speak of lack of understanding: of superficiality, of reflecting insufficiently to withstand "persecution". Discipleship is demanding. Then v. 22: following Christ requires undivided loyalty, single-mindedness. Finally v. 23: only those who adequately reflect (thus coming to understanding), who meet the demands of the faith, and who are truly dedicated are fruitful and bring others to Christ.