

## **Family Problems**

I have been obsessed for the last couple of weeks with Del Shore's plays, comedy, and especially his movie *Sordid Lives*. His storytelling about his relatives and friends in a small town Texas town left me in stitches. I also wondered if we were were a bit related. Denial, betrayal, addiction, violence, eccentrics and religiosity. It felt like I had returned to relatives in Nebraska.

When I relate relatives to friends they act like my outlaws and inlaws are so much different than theirs. In the church there is a notion that we don't acknowledge that our families are less than perfect. We don't want to be honest, we are afraid what people might think.

I have often believed that the current version of the Presbyterian Church USA is like a good episode of the old British comedy "Keeping Up With Appearances." If you have not seen he show it is about Hyacinth Bucket. The comedy revolves around Hyacinth attempts to prove her social superiority, and gains standing with those she considers upper class. This is thwarted by her clear working class background. For her it is all about keeping up the appearance that she fits into a class that will never accept her.

Sometimes in the church we want to act like we are in a different class during our worship than when we return to the family reunion. What if they knew the threatened violence, kleptomaniacs, flashers, abandoning children out, robbery...or maybe I am only talking about my own family. We might have to enter into a spiritual community that abolishes such things as class over and over again in the scripture. If keeping up our class distinctions in the world is essential to us that is something that must be stripped away for us to fully embrace one another as one in Jesus Christ.

When you read through the scriptures this becomes more and more apparent. God is not limited by our finite views of leadership, but inspires the whole human canopy to relay God's message. God tends to not follow whatever the current book of etiquette may be in fulfilling the divine's purpose. God uses murderers, stutterers, drunks, shepherds, sex workers, exotic dancers, immigrants, thieves, persecutors, soldiers, fishermen... It sounds like pretty much anyone in my family tree could qualify to be used by God.

Take the story that is in snippet form this morning from Genesis of Jacob and Esau. Isaac is 40 years old and his wife Rebekah has not been able to conceive of a child. Isaac prays for a child and his prayer is answered. Rebekah is pregnant!

It is a miserable pregnancy. It is so bad she cries out about how terrible this pregnancy has become. She cries out "what is the purpose of me living!"

God answers in a way that I am sure that no pregnant woman ever wants to hear, "You have two nations struggling in you! They will always be divided. The stronger will always dominate the weaker."

Remember that contention by God that the stronger will always rule the weaker.

So, the time of birth comes. She gives birth to two boys. The first comes out and he is all red, very hairy. He is called Esau. This word means hairy or rough.

The second comes holding onto Esau's heel so he was called Jacob. The Hebrew name comes from words **meaning** "to follow, to be behind" but also "to supplant, circumvent, assail, overreach", or from the word for "heel".

As they grew Esau was a man's man. He hunted and loved being in the outdoors. Jacob was much different. He was quiet and lived inside the tents most of his time.

In this family there was no one saying, "I love my children equally." Yes, the parents chose sides. Esau was loved by his father Isaac, and Jacob was loved by his mother Rebekah. They chose favorites.

One day Jacob was cooking a vegetarian stew and Esau came out of the field completely famished.

"Give me some of that, I am starving!" Esau said.

"First you must give me your birthright!" Jacob insists.

"What do I care about a birthright, I am dying!" Esau answers.

"Well, before you get the stew you must swear to me your birthright!"

So, Esau swore his birthright for a pot of stew.

Wait, what?

This story is explaining the creation of two nations. The Israelites and Edomites are said to come from these two children. Two nations. One will be stronger and will dominate the other.

Yet, God does not use the conventions of cultural beliefs to achieve the birth of the nation of Israel. The first born son is always the one who is considered the strongest. The one who the line will be passed down. Who will inherit the birthright. From Jacob to David and beyond God does not go by the cultural conventions, but elevates the younger son.

Also, see that the more masculine (according to social conventions) of these two is not considered the stronger by God. The quiet, homebody, momma's boy, who doesn't hunt, and is cooking vegetarian meals is the one who will gain the birthright, and therefore become the great nation.

I find these stories to be of great hope for some of us who do not seem to fit well into society at large. It appears that inside a spiritual community God recreates the social awkward, deviants, and scoundrels into essential messengers of revelation.

Do you feel lonely in a crowd, do you say things that make you awkward, do you hate yourself, do you put on false appearances for others, does your body odor put some people off, are you annoying, are you poor, have you done things that have cause "good" people to move away from you? Then you are just the type of person God wants today to communicate grace, love, justice, mercy, wisdom, and peace.

Let us move forward as orphans of the world, a messed up family, to help save it from its sin.