

Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
7th Sunday after Pentecost A; 07.16.23; G. Miles Smith+

So I'm getting ready to take some time off for vacation, as usual, but also time off to become a *grandfather* for the first time, sometime around the end of this month. *Ruthie Virginia Smith* is expected to be born July 29th, or thereabouts, and Jennifer and I plan to be there in Asheville, North Carolina. And then we will be available to the family as long as we are able afterwards.

Lots of you have been sharing your experiences of being *grandparents* and you have definitely commended the experience! There are a lot of happy grandparents in this congregation! So I've been receiving your words of delight as a blessing. Thank you for that.

Maybe it is just me—and being a priest and all—but maybe you too?...*that births can lead one to have big thoughts about life.* And maybe that comes to *grandparents* a little more easily than parents at such a time? I know that just anticipating this birth, I'm already having a *vaguely different sense of things...of time...of belonging to a generation within the great sweep of time.*

And so, almost being a grandfather now, I noticed something in the scripture for today that I've not noticed before—the *presence of grandchildren!* The story of the birth of *Esau and Jacob* is, among other things, a story about grandchildren. But it isn't obvious because the focus there is more on those children and their parents, Isaac and Rebekah. The grandfather on Isaac's side of the family, Abraham, is only mentioned at the beginning. When I looked at more of this story, what isn't apparent in the reading today is that Abraham and Sarah had already died before their grandchildren were born. *The legendary Abraham, the great exemplar of faith, the recipient of the great covenant from God—this Abraham and his wife Sarah were never to see any of their grandchildren.* I never realized that before and it is rather poignant to me now that I'm so close to my own grandparenthood. And it is doubly poignant, because for Abraham and Sarah, seeing grandchildren was a big part of the fulfillment of their faith—and yet they did not see it in their lifetimes. *They died still very much needing to trust in God for what was beyond their reach.*

So many of you who are grandparents have already seen much more than Abraham and Sarah did of their generations to follow. And hopefully Jennifer and I will too. *It can feel kind of strange that, in a sense, we are in a position surpassing Abraham and Sarah as grandparents.* And yet all of us, whether we are grandparents or not, parents or not—all of us still end up in the same place as Abraham and Sarah: *of deciding if we can trust God with our lives within the great sweep of time.*

And their lives, I might add, were hardly perfect lives. There was a lot of drama in Abraham and Sarah's life. And in the story today there is getting ready to be a lot of drama in Isaac and his wife Rebekah's life with their twin sons Esau and Jacob. So I guess *we should not be surprised if we too* end up being faced with trusting God with our lives within the great sweep of time *and* in the midst of our own dramas? There is no perfect family life—except maybe on Mother's and Father's Day!?) We all have our stuff--lingering and complicated stuff. And so when the Bible tells the stories of these legendary *and imperfect* biblical families *it is also telling the truth about us too.* And at the same time, it is telling a very unexpected thing about God—that *it is with completely imperfect families that God is pleased to work and pleased to be trusted.*

Of course, I'm going to want everything to be *just right* for little Ruthie, and for her Dad and Mom. We are definitely going to want to *dote* on her. :) But I also expect there is going to be some *new drama* in there somewhere sometime--right? And we will be in the midst of some of it too. *And it will all be mixed up with our joy...* And, as grandparents, we won't be able to see how it all plays out, will we? We will be fortunate to see what we can of Ruthie's life to come. One way or another we all find ourselves in a similar place eventually: we won't be able to see how everything plays out. And we end up where Abraham and Sarah were...*within the great sweep of time...seeking to trust in God...for all that we can now see...and all that will ultimately be beyond our reach...and yet all belonging to God.*