

Day 19 :: Feb. 25

And so Jacob enters the land of Egypt. Jacob the scoundrel, Jacob the trickster, Jacob the liar, Israel the God-wrestler. And here in Egypt, he will die. But before he does, he has a few more tricks to play. Joseph tells his family how best to deal with Pharaoh, and they follow his instructions which gets them the lush pastureland of Goshen. But notice Jacob. As he enters, he blesses Pharaoh. This is important, for it gives Jacob both authority to bless, but also generosity in the blessing. Very political of him. But as he leaves Pharaoh's presence, he blesses him again. Hmmmm...

Do you remember when Isaac gave Jacob his blessing? And then Esau came in to get the blessing and Isaac was flummoxed because he had already given his blessing to Jacob accidentally? When Esau begged for a second blessing, Isaac gave him a prophecy instead. It seems he had only one blessing to give. I wonder if Jacob remembered that and so finished up his story by giving Pharaoh a second blessing. Yes, I have two blessings to give, even if father didn't. I wonder...

Then there is the birthright issue. Traditionally, Jacob would have given an extra portion of the land to the oldest son, Reuben in this case. But instead, we find that he has held back a portion of the land he took from the Amorites, and he gives it to Joseph, his favorite rather than Reuben his eldest.

And finally, back to his blessing. Joseph brings his sons to Jacob for a blessing. First, Jacob claims them for his own (not sure how he did that!) which explains why these two become part of the 12 tribes of Israel (in place of Joseph their father, and Levi, who doesn't get a landed inheritance because they all become priests and so can't hold their own land.) But even beyond that, when Joseph sets them up so Manasseh the eldest gets the right-hand blessing, the best and strongest, Jacob swaps his hands at the last minute and gives Ephraim, the youngest, the right-hand blessing.

After all that Jacob had been through, he still hasn't changed his basic personality. Even here at the end he is still a trickster. He still has little respect for birthright and blessing traditions, and yet he still passes the Covenant on to his son. God uses us for His will, even if we are tricksters, or liars, and even if we never change. Thanks be to God for His amazing power that can use even us for His good purpose.