

Today’s Old Testament lesson from Genesis 25 is somewhat a troubling one. Of many other things, the first thing we know from this popular story is that God chose Jacob, the younger son, over Esau, his older brother. And Jacob is later called Israel and his children are treated as the only legitimate people in the rest of the Bible.

So we can certainly say that it is not fair for God to choose one son over another. The reason is that both Jacob and Esau are guilty of violating basic family relationships. I know Esau did not take his birthright seriously; there are still places even now where the first male child is treated like a prince in the family; can you imagine then how people acted to their first born son in an ancient world like Israel?

So it was quite a shocking story that it was Jacob, the second son, who got all the privileges that a family could offer to its children. And it was too bad that Esau did not know what he was doing; little did he know that trading his birthright for a bowl of soup would cause this problem. He was not just foolish; he was wrong; he should have known not just the privilege of being the firstborn of the family but also the responsibility of it.

But what Jacob did was not right either. He really took advantage of his brother who was in great need. He is not only mean but terribly bad. He is the one who sets the stage for future conflicts in the family. So we wonder why God would choose this kind of trouble maker to carry out His will.

But one thing we need to know: God did not choose Jacob over Esau based on what they did. In fact, God’s decision was made even before these twin boys were born. The verse 23 says: it was sometime during the pregnancy that God said to the mother, “you have two nations in your womb; and two people born of you shall be divided; the older will serve the younger.”

Then, it becomes a more puzzling question than a solution. And the question is “Why did God plan things that way?” It may be good for Jacob and his children; but too bad for Esau and his descendants. We have talked about the conflict between Isaac and Ishmael. But here we are; another conflict among Isaac’s children. Then, what about many other conflicts among Jacob’s children and their children’s children?

Jacob had 12 sons; these 12 tribes are all called Israelites. They all enjoyed prosperity in the time of King Solomon in the 10th century B.C. But after Solomon died, the United Kingdom of Israel was divided into two countries: One is the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was called later Samaria, and the other the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

And the Bible is full of the stories of conflicts between these two nations. The bottom line is that people fight; even brothers and sisters fight; today's text shows that babies fight even while in mother's womb. No wonder that Rebekah, the twin's mother, said: "If it is to be this way, why should I live?" We all can imagine what she meant by that.

So a question we need to ask is not "Why did God let this happen to them and us" or "Why do we fight?" That is not the right question we need to ask; we all know why people fight.

The right question we need to ask is rather, "What can we do to stop fighting. In a way, today's Romans text gives us a fundamental way of winning our spiritual fight that we all have in our lives.

Paul says it is the flesh we are in that becomes a stumbling block
to our faith.

He says this flesh part of us makes us sin.

He says this flesh we have draws our attention to the things in the
world.

He says this sinful bodily nature tries to turn our minds and
thoughts away from God.

He says this part of us weakens our faith so that we do not love
one another,

that we focus on ourselves only,

that we focus on our greed,

that we worry about our life too much.

"Those who are in the flesh," he even says, "cannot please God." This is an amazing statement.

When I read this, I said to myself, "Oh my!" What am I to do? I know who I am; but at the same time, I never know who I am. That is the problem we have; that's why we fight; that's why we always struggle. No matter what I am trying to say and do, I know what I end up doing. That's why I sometimes do not like myself. You know what I mean. That leads me to say that I am a sinner; I am very much in the flesh.

Then, what should I do?

I know I want to be a good, God-loving person. But I know what I am. Paul is right; I am very much in the flesh.

Oh, God, what should I do? That is our struggle; that is the problem we have! We want to get out of this predicament; but we know it is not easy! And sometimes we get hard on ourselves; it is terrible!

But, says Paul right then: “Don’t worry, friend, you are not in flesh.” You are also in the Spirit; you are also in Christ; you are in God’s care; you are in the love of God; the Spirit of Jesus is in you; the Spirit of living God is dwelling in you. You are not your own; you are of God; even before you knew about yourself, God knew you.

I know sometimes life is too hard to live—there are too many things we need to be concerned with. But we need to “get beyond our flesh” to see this new reality. God is with us; the Spirit is within us.

We have to see that we are not alone; God is with us even when we are in stress or distress. Once we see God dwelling within us, we will know that we will be fine. Once we feel the presence of God, we will know we can handle things in a positive way. But sometimes we may just feel terrible even when God is with us; it is not because of God but because of us.

See what Rebekah goes through: while she is still in conversation with God, she says “If it is to be this way, why do I live?” God was still present and she was aware of it even though things reached a point where she couldn’t take it anymore.

But eventually she managed it and had the joy of becoming a mother of twin babies after 20 years of marriage.

Life is complicated; the flesh part of us always tries to blind our spiritual eyes. But God is always with us and within us.

Those of us who earnestly pray and long for this new reality will see it beyond our flesh. Amen.