□□□□□□ REBEKAH □□□□□□

Genesis 25:21-34; 27:1-47; 28:10-17

"I love you most, want you to have the best and I'm willing to bear the consequences."

In the 1960s and l970s, the Smothers Brothers were great hits on television One of the lines Tommy Smothers used with great regularity in talking with his brother was, "Mom always loved you more than me." While it was used in a humorous way and often brought laughs, favouritism within the family is not funny at all. It causes great pain and division. It can lead to violence and family separation.

Rebekah, the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau, was guilty of family favouritism as was her husband. The Bible tells us, *Isaac. who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.* Genesis 25:28 NIV How these parents, loved and chosen by God to be part of His beloved Son's earthly family line, came to pick favourites is unknown. We do know, however, that Esau became a skilled hunter, a man of the open country. Perhaps he came home and told Isaac stories of great adventure – things appealing to the "macho" image of his father. Perhaps Isaac thought of Esau as a "man's man." Jacob, on the other hand, was a stay-at-home person. The Bible says, *Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents.* Genesis 25:27b NIV Perhaps by being around his mother more, Jacob and Rebekah developed a close, loving relationship which may have been envied by Esau. Regardless of how the favouritism developed within the family, its consequences were very sad.

In Biblical times, the blessing of the birthright (given to the oldest son) was of great importance. The oldest son in the family was especially valued and at his father's death received two-thirds of the family estate. The birthright carried with it special privilege and honour. In the case of Esau and Jacob, even though they were twins, Esau, by virtue of being delivered first, became the older son. The birthright was to be his. An incident in their young adult life caused Esau to despise and give up his birthright to Jacob, an action of great consequence, but perhaps unknown to the parents.

When the time of Isaac's death drew near and he was about to give Esau the blessing of the firstborn, Rebekah overheard the conversation. Not wanting Esau to have the blessing, she quickly schemed to have Jacob receive it instead. She was fully aware that once a blessing was given it could not be withdrawn or given to someone else. She called Jacob and made all of the necessary preparations for the meal which was part of the ceremony. She planned the deceitful process so that her favourite son would receive the blessing which rightfully belonged to his older brother. Jacob went along with her scheming, lied to his father and received the blessing. When Esau returned to receive his blessing, he found that his father had been tricked into giving it to Jacob. Esau became so angry that Jacob was forced to leave his home and mother in order to save his life. A family separation of more than 20 years followed and there was much bitterness and sadness as a result.

Rebekah paid a big price for choosing to play favourites. Not only was her family separated, but she may never have seen Jacob again. There was strife and hatred, distrust and scheming. Jacob, who was forced to flee home in order to avoid the wrath of his brother, went to live with his uncle, Rebekah's brother, Laban.

How often we get ourselves into critical situations involving our families. And God bails us out each time...just as he did with Jacob. His mother, who schemed to give him the very best because she loved him more, had to be left behind. The comfort of a home and friends now became things of the past. He was lonely, but not alone. As Jacob fled and laid his weary and troubled head down for the night, God came to him in a special dream in which Jacob realized that God would never leave him or forsake him.

And Rebekah? How much family strife might have been averted had Rebekah permitted God to put His plan into action! In spite of her scheming and deceit, she was used by God to be part of the early history of her Lord and Saviour. God uses sinners like Rebekah and you and me to further His kingdom. None of us, by ourselves, would be fit to serve the Lord. But through our baptism, God calls us. Through the Word and Sacrament, He equips us for service to Him.

Prayer: Father in heaven, in Your wisdom, You ordained marriage and the family. Help us, as we live together, to do it in peace and harmony. Help us not to show favouritism. You value each one of us more than we can imagine. Help us to value each other. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

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