

Texts: Matthew 13:1-9, Genesis 25:19-34

With the ways of God, things don't always add up as we expect them. Our reading Genesis has shifted to the second generation: Isaac. His father, Abraham, we read, died at the age of 175. Abraham was 100 when his son, Isaac, was born. So, he lived till his son was 75 years old. Must be the old math.

Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah. This is the couple who must give birth to the next generation. As the only couple selected by God to continue the line of promise, spoken to Abraham and Sarah, they also confront a similar problem. They were unable to have children. This means trouble. For the family unit itself, the future will be cut off if they don't have children. For the larger scale promise of the God to Abraham and Sarah, it would be complete failure, putting a black mark on the potency of this God. It only makes sense that God would want them to have children, for God to do everything in his power to make that possible. "Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, since she was not able to have children. The Lord was moved by his prayer, his wife became pregnant." Their sons were born when Isaac was 60. We're not told when Isaac spoke the prayer which "moved the Lord". We might say the Lord moved SLOWLY. Things of God don't happen according to human sensibilities; God is not bound by human expectations. But the Lord answered their prayer.

"The boys pushed against each other inside of her, and she said, 'If this is what it's like, why did it happen to me?'" We're only 25 chapters in before the Bible records the first "Why, Lord?" or "Why me?" question. It is from a woman, pregnant, in unbearable pain because she is pregnant with battling twins generated by God. Why me, Lord? Deftly responding with the rhetorical skill of a politician, the Lord gives an answer, but it's an answer to a different question. Perhaps like our queries of "Why me, Lord?". "Two nations are in your womb; two different peoples will emerge from your body. One people will be stronger than the other; the older will serve the younger." No wonder she hurts! Those are not just twin sons in her womb; there's two nations in there! Two distinct peoples, competing for prominence, and their roles will eventually be flipped. Why, Lord? No answer. It just is; it's reality. It is a painful reality.

When I was a seminary student, at McCormick Seminary in Chicago, I worked part-time, down in the basement, making copies of papers for professors. This was in the days of old-school duplication technology. I worked the ditto machine, the mimeograph machine, as well as the new-fangled, more expensive to use copy machine. I could do it all. I cleverly declared myself the Reproduction Specialist. Along with the original document, I had each professor complete a form with the name of the requester, which form of reproduction needed, how many copies, date needed. I was a dependable, competent Reproduction Specialist!

Isaac prayed to the Lord for a child. It took 20 years. It produced two warring nations who brought misery to their mother and would lead to a split in their parents: Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob. All I needed was the original and a completed request

form: Done! All I did was duplicate. God never duplicates. Number, timing, means determined by God. Each one unlike any other. Each created with purpose. Each one endowed with value, guided by promise, and gifted with love by the Creator.

It adds up differently with God. The answers we receive from our prayers. The amount of time it takes before we notice answers. And it is not all celebration when we get God's response. It may complicate life. Bring pain and heartbreak. It can humble us. Leave us asking why, without an answer. Each one unique; no duplicates. Our Creator crafts a world of prolific difference; fraught with potential for tension, conflict, and trouble, saturated with blessing.

Two plus two equals four. Isaac plus Rebekah, produce two sons, Esau and Jacob, who generate trouble and division, even before their birth. They spread it to their mother, and the father. They'll shatter the conventional ordering of who's number one. Everyone knows the older is first, but not now. Isaac prayed to God for a child. God promised and generated new and different blessings. It doesn't always add up according to our standard formulas.

Jesus taught the crowd a parable about a rather silly, wasteful farmer, scattering seeds wherever. Seeds are little self-contained reproducing packages, tiny things filled with unimaginable life-generating potential, each one different, each filled with multiple regeneration possibilities. Look no farther than the desert that surrounds us. These amazing cacti and those desert plants growing and multiplying where no life should have any chance to prosper, in our thinking. Shrubs that grow on rocks. Saguaros, decades, centuries old, standing tall on hard, hardly even there, soil. Why, Lord?

The farmer scatters these tiny life packages all over the place, without restraint, without thought to their chances of making it. Three of the four spots described by Jesus fail to offer any real chance. The seeds don't make it. But some fell on good soil and made up for anything that was lacking. The seeds multiplied a hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold. Life, randomly, lavishly scattered by the farmer, prevails. The seeds prosper. It's not uniform. It's not simple, straight-forward, mechanical duplication, submitted in written form, like I did as Reproduction Specialist. It's way different with the Lord. It's a world of difference.

Trouble starts when the Lord answers Isaac's prayer. Trouble begins, and increases, as the boys become nations. Tensions and danger heighten, still today, but the promise sustains, still today. Trouble flourishes, tensions increase, complications deepen, heartbreak and pain widen, but God's seeds for a blessed future remain.

Ever since we had our fire alarm system inspected, here in this building, there's been a glitch in the communication between the fire alarm and the security system. We don't know why. The people on our call list with the security company are getting frequent calls. "We are getting a trouble signal from The Holy Way Presbyterian Church, which we need to alert you to. This is not an emergency, so emergency vehicles will not be sent. It is only a trouble signal." It's only trouble. We don't know why.

There's two different systems; communication between the two is faulty. But, it's only trouble; God's promises remain intact. No emergency. The monsoon rains have come. Seeds are scattered all over creation. God's signature of abundant life prevails. We can hear the desert plants and creatures add their voices to our chorus of praise this morning. It's still the same, old math: it does add up, it's still multiplying. We belong to God, promise.