

Genesis 25:19-34
Psalm 119:105-112

Romans 8:1-11
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

There is a story of a young Naval Academy graduate, who after completing his first overseas cruise, was given an opportunity to display his talents at getting his ship underway and out of port. The young officer's efficiency established a new record for getting a naval ship underway. He was stunned, however, when a sailor approached him with a message from their captain. "My personal congratulations upon completing your underway preparations exercise according to the book and with amazing speed. In your haste however, you have overlooked one of the fundamental rules -- make sure the captain is on board before you leave." Boy, I bet that sailor felt stupid! I am sure that that sailor regretted his actions.

Poor Esau had his regrets. Esau and his brother Jacob, sons of Isaac and Rebekah, were twins, they were womb-mates! They did not get along. When they were in the womb, they struggled with each other. When they were born, Jacob had a hold of Esau's heel. Jacob's name means "heel" that is, one who kicks his way out, or "supplanter," the one who would displace the twin. The parents Isaac and Rebekah play into this conflict for Jacob favors Esau and Rebekah favors Jacob. The conflict went on for years. Talk about sibling rivalry.

Esau, being the oldest child, meant that Esau had the birthright. The birthright went to the eldest son and it meant two things. First of all, the eldest son received a double portion of the inheritance. So, if there were two brothers, the oldest one, the one with the birthright, received two-thirds of the inheritance, the other brother one third. And, the birthright meant leadership among the brothers after the death of the father. One day, Esau came in from working in the field and he was hungry. His brother Jacob

was making a stew. Esau asked for some of the “red stuff.” Jacob bargained with Esau. Give me your birthright and I will give you some stew. Esau makes a careless decision. He sells his birthright. Esau is hungry and he agrees. He sells his birthright. Evidently, Esau despises his birthright and the family it signifies. It is a careless decision, a decision that he will regret later in life.

The struggle between the two brothers continued. Rebekah hatched a plan to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob, rather than the eldest son, who should have received the blessing. When Esau discovered how Jacob had deceived his father, how Jacob had stolen his blessing, Esau is angry, but there is nothing Isaac can do for a blessing could not be rescinded. Eventually, Jacob flees back to Haran, the homeland of his ancestors, to escape Esau’s wrath for Esau was planning to kill him. Their sibling rivalry was a story filled with careless decisions and regrets.

We may have our regrets about careless decisions. We may have our regrets about some of our own careless decisions. Maybe like Jacob or Esau we have been the source of conflict within our own families. We have said things or done things to offend someone. We may feel that we did nothing wrong, but someone has offended or hurt, and we regret that. Maybe it was a decision to turn down a full-ride scholarship which would have enabled us to go to college. We turned down the opportunity to join in the family business. We ran with the wrong crowd or dabbled with drugs back in our high school days. We may regret the years we were the school bully. One of my regrets was not keeping the car I had in high school and my freshmen year in college. A apple-red 1963 Olds 88 Dynamic, two door hard top, with a 394, 4 barrel carburetor, that passed

everything but a gas station. Boy, I really wish I had that car today! Nadine Stair, an 85 year-old patient who was facing death, wrote

I would take more chances, I would take more
Trips, I would scale more mountains,
I would swim more rivers, and I would
Watch more sunsets. I would eat more
Ice cream and fewer beans.
I would have more actual troubles
And fewer imaginary ones. You see ...
I was one of those people who lived
Prophylactically and sensibly and sanely,
Hour after hour and day after day
... I've been
One of those people who never went anywhere without
A thermometer, a hot water bottle, a gargle, a
Raincoat and a parachute
If I had it to do all over again,
I'd travel lighter, much lighter,
Than I have.
I would start barefoot earlier
In the spring, and I'd stay that way
Later in the fall. And I would
Ride more merry-go-rounds, and
Catch more gold rings, and greet
More people, and pick more flowers,
And dance more often. If I had it
To do all over again.
But you see,
I don't.

We too may have regrets, with the stupid decisions we made in the past, with our careless decisions. Like Esau, we may have been thinking only in the moment, and not about our futures.

Esau was able to overcome his regret and anger to claim not only peace with himself and his family, but also reclaim some portion of his life that had been lost. But it doesn't happen over night. Jacob prospered when he escaped to Haran. After many years in Haran Jacob decides to return home to Canaan. Jacob is concerned that Esau was still out to kill him, but in the end Jacob and Esau reconcile. Esau himself became a

rather prosperous man. Esau overcomes his regret and anger and was able to regain some of his life that had been lost.

There are other people in the Bible who had their regrets, and yet were able to overcome them and regain a life that could have been lost. Peter denied knowing Jesus three times during the trials that led up to Jesus' crucifixion, and yet Peter becomes one of the star disciples in the very early history of the church as reported in Acts. When Stephen, was martyred, the first Christian to be martyred, we read that Paul "approved of their killing him." The apostle Paul persecuted Christians. He experienced a conversion experience on the road to Damascus, and Paul founded many churches from Israel to Rome. They all had their regrets, and yet they were able to regain their lives!

As William Shakespeare said, "What's done is done." We cannot do anything about it. However, through God we can overcome our regrets, and regain some of our lives that we have lost due to our careless decisions. God is always giving us a second chance. J. R. Miller wrote: "Christ is building his kingdom with the broken things of earth. People desire only the strong, successful, victorious and unbroken things in life to build their kingdoms, but God is the God of the unsuccessful - the God of those who have failed." If God only worked with successful people, it would greatly limit the fulfillment of God's kingdom.

Perhaps the hard part is recognizing, realizing, that we are valued by God, just as Esau was valued by God. Perhaps we should start each day, repeating to ourselves the mantra, "I am loved and valued by God. I am loved and valued by God."

Thanks be to God
through Jesus Christ our Lord.