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God's Gonna do What God's Gonna do

It isn't fair. This is a phrase I hear a lot around my house; usually one of my children is saying some such thing to either Laurie or myself; "No, you can't watch more T.V.," "That's not fair!"

We want things to be fair in life, even though we know they're not; How many times have parents responded to that cry from their kids with "Life's not fair!" But beyond grievances of children, there are disappointments, there are tragedies, and there are things we could have never seen coming; yet their remains hope; hope that God is at work always in the world's confusion and suffering. But still, it just doesn't seem fair does it?

Jacob didn't think it was fair either. He didn't think it was fair that Esau should be heir to their father's wealth and God's promises. After all they were twins, Esau just happened to come into the world first. So Jacob does what his name would suggest, he strives for more; more than is given to him. If you remember he was named 'Jacob' because he was born holding onto his brothers ankle; Jacob in Hebrew means striving, to overreach. The name suits him; last week we heard of Jacob convincing Esau to exchange his birthright for stew, then what prompted Jacob's fleeing today is that Jacob had tricked Isaac into bestowing upon him the blessing that was Esau's by tradition as the first born son. In our story today Jacob is fleeing for his life because of Esau's anger. Esau didn't think it was fair either. The birthright and blessing were rightfully his, according to tradition.

Jacob is a trickster; he is conniving; he's not someone most of us would easily tolerate, I don't think. Yet the biblical record does not pronounce any moral judgment against him. God appears to Jacob in a dream, no less and shares that God's promises to Abraham and Isaac will carry on through him. It's not fair, we might think; Jacob is not someone who deserves such treatment.

To which God might say, "Life's not fair, how you've constructed it anyway." You see God again and again throughout scripture through stories like Jacob and Esau shows us that God does not play by our rules; God's gonna do what God's gonna do.

If you've seen the movie "Knives Out" with Daniel Craig this is the driving question of the film; Who is deserving? After their wealthy father dies suddenly the family is shocked to learn that all of his wealth will be passed on to Marta, their father's faithful nurse whose mother immigrated to United States illegally before Marta was born. The family does not think this is fair and the plot twists and turns around this question. They think they're all deserving and good people; yet how can we be so sure who is deserving and good?

In our reading from Matthew today we come at this from a different angle; the parable Jesus tells says essentially that some people are good and some are bad. But as with most things Jesus says, it's a little more complicated than that. The problem is that we often cannot tell who is who. Jesus tells us though that that's not our concern; we are not called to condemn another, we are called to grow in the life of Christ, we are called to grow into members of the kingdom of God.

It must be stated too that this parable is not a clean analogy between weeds and people. A weed cannot, in real life, grow into wheat, but Jesus never says here that the weeds cannot in fact grow into wheat. He was a carpenter remember, not real keen on his agriculture I guess. The point is that growth can come at any stage in our lives, transformation can happen to anyone. People are people, not completely good, not completely bad; it's more complicated than that.

A small example of this: I was at Walmart on July 3rd trying to get propane for my grill. Why we need a store to be as big as a Walmart Super Center I do not pretend to know, they stress me out. I had done some other shopping and drove my car over to the garden center to get propane; problem was because of their safety protocols they weren't letting anyone enter through the garden center and to enforce this they had an employee sitting there to direct people to the front. I was annoyed. I asked what the easiest way to get propane was; I got a curt response: you have to go the front; I tried to ask a follow up question: same response: you have to go to the front. I very quickly and very rudely responded: Thanks for being so helpful; and stormed off...I showed her. I consider myself a good person, but I know I can be rude and mean to people, I am capable of that. And yet I have to believe that God is active in my life. I believe God is active in your life too, in all our lives. God uses all of us and all of this mess we find ourselves in, God sees us through. God sees us through.

The story of Jacob and stories of other tricksters throughout scripture, remind us that God regularly uses unlikely people to carry out God's mission. God uses prostitutes, adulterers, tax collectors, the sick, occupying armies, liars, cheats, to carry out God's promises; God uses people.

But what makes these people unlikely heroes is not what they've done or who they are; what makes them unlikely is our assessments of them, our own judgments of their behaviors. We might look at someone like Jacob and reserve some choice words for him. If someone sells their body for sex we are inclined to think they are immoral and ignore the circumstances that made that means of revenue seem like an option. We've seen people who are black and judged them as criminals or as a problem before we've actually even seen them as a person. The Church for quite some time now has been too comfortable identifying the "weeds" among us and taking it upon herself to pull them out; the gay, the transgender, the woman, the slave, the divorced.

God again and again tells us that judgment is God's alone. All those things we think are fair and right, God reminds us through God's Word, through scripture that God does not follow our rules; God follows God's own rules and God alone will determine what is just and fair. We are not equipped to pull the weeds, we are not asked to pull the weeds; we are not capable of identifying the weeds. If Jacob can be used to fulfil the promises of God, then so can I, and so can you, and so can the people who use St. Paul's steps as a resting place to eat their meal or use our garden for some rest.

God is active here among us; we just may not yet be equipped to see how. But my prayer for the Church and its people is that those who encounter us, the broken, the vulnerable, the loving people of God, those who encounter us in the world may leave that encounter knowing that surely God is in this place, that God is all around; even today, and especially tomorrow. Amen.