

Trinity Church
July 13, 2008

9 Pentecost
Year A, Proper 10, RCL

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

O Lord, our God, the Spirit of the Risen Jesus dwells in us. by that Holy Spirit, give us life of body and soul in abundant service to you, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

As an only child, I took it for granted that everyone was created equal, and I took that to mean that everyone was endowed by their Creator with about the same ability and opportunity as everyone else. I got what I needed, and I assumed that everyone else had what they needed as well.

But then Debbie and I married, and if that weren't challenge enough to my only child status, we had two children, and for the first time in my life, I ran into sibling rivalry. It was totally baffling. I can remember sitting at the dinner table with Effie and Will, and trying to cut a piece of pie for each of them. There was plenty of pie, they could each have what they wanted, but I soon learned that that was not the issue. Each piece had to be exactly the same. Same size, same number of cherries, same amount of crust. If we had had a micrometer to measure, and scales to weigh, they would have insisted that they be used. After prolonged squabbling, tantrums, and tears, I had no stomach for pie at all, and frankly, little use for equality, or being fair, if it was just an excuse to fight over scraps that fall from the material table.

Rivalry, I suppose, comes from the fear that we will get the short end of the stick, or be left out when blessings are distributed. And this fear is real. We may be created equal, but after that it is clear that some seed is eaten by birds, and some falls on rock, some is scorched, some withered, some grows up with thorns, some is choked. And some falls on good soil and prospers, bringing forth a rich harvest. Who can endure such random justice? Who can abide such arbitrary affection?

It is like those twins struggling in Rebekah's womb to see who will be born first. Esau was born seconds before Jacob, who came out grasping Esau's heel. The twins were each gifted in unique ways, Esau a hunter, Jacob the gardener. But seconds made a difference. Esau held the birth right to succeed their father, Isaac, and Jacob did not. As irony would have it, Esau disregarded this spiritual gift. He cared only for his hunting. He assumed he was chosen. Now, Jacob treasured what he didn't have, the spiritual legacy of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham. It pained him to see it so disregarded. So, when the opportune time came, Jacob bought the most precious gift God had to offer for a pot of stew. Jacob assumed nothing. God's blessing comes to those who long for it, not to those who assume they have it. This is another mystery. Some people get it, some don't care, some get it a little bit, some forget, some lose it, some have it stolen from them. How can there be so many ways to relate to God's grace poured out?

I cannot unravel this mystery any more than I can cut two pieces of pie that are exactly the same. But two truths help me.

The Word of God is abundant, and poured out everywhere as grace upon grace. Rebekah and Isaac needed only one child. The abundance of God's Word gave them two. No gardener in his right mind sows valuable seed where it won't grow. God, it seems, sows the Word everywhere and anywhere. God's Word of truth and God's ceaseless love abide in everyone and in every

place and circumstance, and dwell there fully and completely, no matter what size the piece of pie is. What a joy to know this is true. It means that I can look beyond rivalry to a deeper abundance that is richer by far than equity or fairness.

The second truth is that God's Word does not return to God empty. The prophet Isaiah makes this clear in a passage that Jesus may have had in mind when he told the parable of the sower. "As rain and snow fall from the heavens and return not again, but water the earth, bringing forth life and giving growth, seed for sowing, and bread for eating, so is my word that goes forth from my mouth; it will not return to me empty; but it will accomplish that which I have purposed, and prosper is that for which I sent it."

The seed that God sows so lavishly and recklessly will accomplish its purpose, prosper in that for which God sowed it. I may not know how, or see that it is happening, but it is so. A deep and mysterious hope indeed. A hope to which I cling.

Jesus returned to the image of seed again when talking about himself. "Unless a seed is planted in the earth and dies, it can never sprout and bring forth growth. So with the Son of Man. Only in death can the Word of life be proclaimed in resurrection and life."

God's word has been sown in your heart. God's word resides in your soul. God's Spirit has come upon you, and it will accomplish its purpose, life of body and soul in abundant service to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. What piece of the pie you receive doesn't really matter.