

SERMON NOTES: NOV. 24th
SCRIPTURE READINGS...GENESIS 27: 30-40, MATTHEW 7: 7-11

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING...compared to 3/4 of the world's people, we are blessed nation: blessed with freedom, opportunity, resources. God's blessings abound but they are perceived/received only by those who are open to RECEIVING them. Are all of life's blessings recognized/valued? Are blessings only the wonderful things that make life good? The Jews had a blessing for everything: to bless crops, to pass on traditions, to install Kings, and to confer worth to family. None were more special than receiving a FATHER'S BLESSING. Esau stands before his blind Father, Issac, pleading for HIS BLESSING which his CON ARTIST brother Jacob had already stolen, **FATHER, HAVE YOU RESERVED A BLESSING FOR ME? Jesus blest all kinds of people-the needy, the sinful, outcasts-blessed them with his time, attention, and words. He says today:**

If you are who evil know how to give GOOD GIFTS to your kids, how much more will God give GOOD THINGS to those who ask.

GOD, THE GIFT GIVER...those words once bothered me. Jesus seems to come bearing gifts, describing God as a LOVING PARENT who blesses stubborn children. Was he writing a BLANK CHECK, promising prosperity? Push God's buttons, say the right words, then God becomes a DOTING GRANDFATHER who can't say no to anything. His words-seeking/asking/knocking-weren't a secret prayer formula designed to manipulate God. He is revealing God's nature: God wants to be known. He is a LOVING PARENT, whom Jesus called ABBA, who wants to bless his children.

A FATHER WHOSE BLESSING IS NEVER REMOVED, LIMITED TO DESERVING OR THE 1ST BORN; WHO BLESSES US NOT BECAUSE OF WHAT WE'VE DONE OR FAIL TO DO, BUT BECAUSE OF WHO WE ARE/WHOSE WE ARE; WHO LOVES US WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED; WHO NEVER WITHDRAW HIS BLESSINGS.

GOOD THINGS GOD GIVES...God gives us MORE THAN WE DESERVE. He gives us not just WHAT WE NEED, but WHAT WE NEVER KNEW WE NEEDED.

THE GIFT OF LOVE...in Jesus, God gave UNCONDITIONAL LOVE. He loved even when it wasn't convenient, when it wasn't RETURNED. He said that his followers would be known by the distinctive way we love GOD/OTHERS
THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS... Jesus specialized in 2ND CHANCES, not GUILT. He accepted people AS THEY WERE but loved too much to let them stay as they were. By his mercy, he moved them to where THEY COULD BE THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT: God's best blessing isn't ANSWERING PRAYERS, solving problems, healing wounds, but the COMPANIONSHIP of the HOLY SPIRIT in our lives.