

1

I thought about staying home all week and not writing a sermon since I wasn't sure any of us would be here today. The world was supposed to end yesterday, and so I thought about spending my last week with my family, sitting in my yard, enjoying the beautiful weather. I thought maybe I should call my son in Louisiana and my daughter in China and the grandkids in Kentucky and tell them all one more time that I love them.

Some of you are looking a bit confused. Did you get the message that the world was supposed to end on Saturday? A Christian who studies numbers in scriptures said a code in the Bible and the recent solar eclipse and hurricanes along with a date marked in the pyramids in Egypt pointed to September 23 as the end. The mysterious Plant X was supposed to pass by the Earth and create volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and earthquakes.¹

Obviously that did not happen, so here we are, carrying on with life. I sometimes wonder if those who predict the end of the world based on "proofs" from the Bible have lost their vision of who God is. I don't imagine God creating hints about a planned

destruction of our lives, for I see God as one who strives to bring about life and the best possibilities for us, not as one creating secret plots for our end.

For some, eyes grow dim making it difficult to see what God is doing, as was the case with Isaac in the story of Genesis. This morning's story begins with the narrator telling us that Isaac's "eyes were dim so that he could not see." He called his oldest son Esau and asked him to go and hunt and prepare a meal so he could bless him before he died, but since he could not see, Isaac's wife, Rebekah, had another idea in mind. She called her younger son, Jacob, and asked him to take his father a meal and be blessed.

"But Mom, even though Dad can't see, he'll know I'm not Esau, for I have smooth skin and he has hairy arms. As soon as Dad hugs me he'll know I'm not his older son."

"Don't worry, my son," said Rebekah, "Put this wool on your arms and then you'll feel hairy like your brother." The trick worked, and the younger son Jacob received a blessing from his father, and in doing so, he ran away to another country to hide

2

from his older brother Esau, who was now furious that his younger brother had stolen what belonged to him.

This may sound like a strange plot for us today, for we try to treat our children equally, but in the ancient world, the oldest son inherited the property and wealth of the father. That was the tradition. The way things were done. For Rebekah and Jacob to trick Isaac was scandalous, not the way things were done.

Although Isaac's eyes were dim, Rebekah's eyes saw a way to make a future for her younger son. That seems to be a pattern in the stories in Genesis—God doesn't follow the norms by choosing the oldest. You may recall that Moses was the younger brother of Aaron and Miriam, and yet God invited him to help the Israelites escape from the Pharaoh. David was the youngest of six brothers but was chosen as the next king of Israel. Even in the midst of doing things the way we always do them, God might have other ideas in mind when things don't go according to our plans.

Have you ever had a hard time seeing what God is up to in the world? It may feel as though the lights are dim, for God often calls the most unlikely people to help. Even when eyes are dim, when we can't see, God can do some surprising things, as was the case when a young girl was selling apples.

A group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. They had assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for dinner. In their rush through the airport, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table which held a display of apples. Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane, just in time. All but one. He told the others to go on without him and went back to where the apples were all over the floor. He was glad he did.

The little girl, the apple seller, was totally blind! She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks, as she groped for her spilled produce, the crowd swirling about her, rushing to their flights.

The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped reorganize her display. He set aside the bruised and battered apples in a separate basket. When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, “Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did.”

“Are you okay?” he asked. She nodded through her tears.

He continued, “I hope we didn’t spoil your day too badly.”

As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, “Mister....” He paused and turned to look back.

She continued, “Are you Jesus?”²

Have you ever been in such a hurry that you missed something—your eyes too dim to see? While all the others ran on by, too busy to see what they had done, one person saw what had happened and returned to help.

Even though the girl could not see with her eyes, she saw the light of the one person who had stopped to help her; she knew God was in that

place. Sometimes what we do in our lives can help others see the surprising light of God’s blessing.

Just as this girl discovered a blessing when her eyes were dim, Jacob discovered a blessing in the middle of the night, when the lights were dim, while running away from his brother. Just imagine Jacob’s mixture of feelings: excitement that he had received his father’s one and only blessing, anxiety about being deceptive, grateful that his mother had helped him, sad that his father was hurt due to his trickery, fear from his brother’s anger, worry about running away from home, and uncertainty about what to do now that he was on his own.

While lying down for a troubled night’s sleep, with a stone for a pillow, Jacob dreamed of a ladder or stairway reaching into heaven, with God’s angels climbing up and down. God stood beside Jacob and reminded him of the blessing given to his father and grandfather: that many descendants would come from their family, more than he could count, and through them all the families of the earth would be blessed, which includes you and me! Isn’t that amazing? In the midst of tricking his brother and

④

running away, God remained with Jacob and carried on the blessing of his family.

How many times have we messed up something in our own families, wondering how to get out of the chaos? Brothers and sisters pick on one another, spouses forget to talk with one another, children break family rules, parents don't understand the younger generation. Family members may feel the lights have gone dim, that they can't see where to go. It's in these times we need to remember what Jacob heard in his dream, words of hope that I think we all long to hear from God: "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go."

Think of the last time you needed some reassurance that God was with you—especially after messing up in a really big way, as Jacob did when he stole his brother's blessing. Oftentimes when we make mistakes, it feels as though the lights have gone dim, as though we can't see our way. The guilt of our sin casts a shadow over us, leaving us in the dark. In the midst of messing up our lives, we may

see no options. At night we may feel as though we're sleeping on a stone pillow, tossing and turning on a bunch of rocks.

It's in these times that we may discover what Jacob learned when he proclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it." In times when we're not sure where to turn, when lights are dim, God is in that place—even if you don't know it. When life falls apart, God is in that place. When some predict the world will end, and even when you feel *your* world has ended, God is in that place. When you can't seem to find your way, God is in that place. When you don't know where to go, God is in that place—even if you don't know it. When the lights are dim, when you don't know what to do, God reaches out to us, just as Jacob experienced in a ladder reaching to heaven, reminding him and us that God is in this place doing some surprising things!

¹ www.fox32chicago.com/news/national/biblical-prophecy-claims-the-world-will-end-on-sept-23-christian-numerologists-claim

² Anonymous, found in several sources.