

## **“Heavenly Hand-Me-Downs”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

July 9, 2023 - Sixth Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 9

[Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30](#)

During our recent worship service on Children’s Sunday, I mentioned that I am the youngest of three siblings, and that one of the realities of being the youngest that I experienced, often painfully, was losing contests of strength and endurance such as the wrist-wrenching game of Mercy. Another reality of being the youngest was that much of what I had as a kid was passed down to me from my older brothers, including their long-out-of-style clothing, in the form of hand-me-downs. This produced much pain, of an emotional rather than physical variety, as the wearing of well-worn, green, bell-bottomed, corduroy trousers with numerous holes covered by multi-colored mushroom patches, in an era when none of those things was remotely cool, but quite the opposite, did not help me to have a healthy self-esteem or vibrant social life.

If you have older siblings or relatives who graciously shared with you their old, outdated stuff, perhaps because you have parents, like mine, who were exceedingly frugal, you may understand my pain. But even if you’re an oldest or only child, you might also relate, as we’ve all received hand-me-downs of various kinds from our families. Even if you were not gifted with ugly green pants or out-of-style jeans, you have received from your family your genes of the kind that determine the color of your eyes, the straightness of your hair, or the shape of your nose. Our families hand down to us all these genes that determine what we look like, what we sound like, and even abilities that lead us to act a certain way. And our families have handed down to us all sorts of other qualities through the environments that they provided for us, further shaping and molding us as we grew. Some of the traits and qualities we’ve received through these hand-me-downs, unlike the ugliest pair of pants on the planet, we can truly appreciate and be grateful for.

Today’s scripture lesson from Genesis tells of a good set of hand-me-downs. It tells the story of how Isaac, son of Sarah and Abraham, whose family story we have been following over the course of the last few Sundays, and his wife Rebekah found one another and came together as a family. All through the story,

we see signs that God's blessing is upon Isaac and Rebekah. In this story, in which conflict is absent and all are prosperous, God's guidance and blessing seems to be everywhere (at least by the standards of people living in the Ancient Near East). These gifts are handed down to the happy couple, Isaac and Rebekah, from their families, who were given these blessings by God. Even when it seemed impossible, God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have offspring that would be as numerous as the stars in the sky who would come to live and thrive in a good land, and this promise and the blessings that came with it are now passed on to the next generation. This inheritance of God's blessing and promise is a pretty good, heavenly hand-me-down!

Perhaps in your own life, you sense that God's blessings have come to you through your own family. Perhaps it is because of your family identity and traditions that you have come to be where you are on your own journey of faith. Or perhaps your story is quite different than the stories of Isaac and Rebekah and Sarah and Abraham, and you feel that your family has provided you more grief than blessing. Perhaps you had to leave the ways of your family to be where you are in life and on your faith journey, and it is only in blazing your own trail that you feel you have moved closer to where God wants you to be.

Whatever your story is, whatever you've been given from your own family, whether you feel it is good, bad, and/or ugly, you are called to claim a new identity as a follower and sibling of Christ. As we heard from our reading from the gospel of Matthew, we are graciously called by Christ our Brother to give him our own burdens, whatever they are and however it is that we've come to carry them, and to take upon ourselves his burden, which he seeks to hand on to us, and the burden that Christ carried, and passes on to us is a burden that is light and provides rest for our weary souls.

And what is his burden? It is to humbly and gently love, to welcome those who feel unwelcomed, to bless those who feel unblessed in life or cursed by life, to pass on whatever grace we've been given. Selfless, serving, giving love is the value of the family of Christ's followers that is to guide each of us, above all others. And if we will live by love, we will find our other burdens becoming lighter and more manageable as we are blessed by God's peace.

So, today, let us serve in love, passing on whatever heavenly hand-me-downs we've received, and may God's peace be in us and among us. Amen.