

July 24, 2011 Ord 17A

Scripture: Genesis 29:15-28

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?"

Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful.

Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."

Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me."

So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed."

So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast.

But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her.

(Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.)

When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?"

Laban said, "This is not done in our country--giving the younger before the firstborn.

Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years."

Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

the Somalis are starving, Norwegian youth are terrorized by a man armed with an automatic weapon and hate.

Maybe that is why I read the news and do not watch it, too much reality sometimes.

The Jacob saga is real: real people, real challenges.

In addition to the Bible being God's truth to us, we also see an honest picture of God's people. There is sexism, deception, sly business deals, trickery that Jacob must have inherited from his mother's side of the family. Uncle Laban is as sly as Jacob.

Scenes from earlier- Jacob- stolen his brother's birthright and his father's blessing,

now on the run from his brother Esau who wants to kill him...

Along the way Jacob has an encounter with the living God who promises his presence, protection, and blessing. Jacob has a dream of a ladder leading to heaven and God speaks to him of this promise and blessing.

What happens next is that Jacob gets a little taste of his own medicine.

He is tricked into marrying Leah, the older daughter of Laban.

In a time when marriage was more of a business deal between fathers and young men, romantic love has little importance.

These marriage practices sound strange, but remember polygamy and concubines were the norm.

Having no dowry to offer Uncle Laban for his daughter Rachel, Jacob must work 7 years when 6 six years was standard.

As my father in law would say, "He is real proud of his daughter"... since he's charging more. Leah, the first born daughter, has not been married, and so Laban finds himself at odds with custom. The second born daughter never marries first, so he does a little switcharoo on the wedding night, aided by bridal veils and too much wine at the marriage feast.

Maybe when he made the original promise, Laban was keeping his options open. Anyway, the most intimate of relationship is treated like a poker game.

I think if I were Jacob, I would be asking the Lord, "Is this what you meant when you spoke to me in my dream? Are you with me, protecting me, and blessing me?"

If we read on in the Jacob saga, we find that the marriages produce 13 children for this family. Those children will become the 12 tribes of Israel. And eventually, Laban and Jacob will reconcile and make a vow to one another. Blessing will be made manifest.

Here's a little test, how many of you remember who came in 2nd in last year's National College Football championship? Oregon...Okay that was easy.

But usually 2nd place teams are forgotten. 1st Place winners are remembered.

Leah is the 2nd choice for a wife, but she gets to be first. While 2nd choice, she is more fertile.

Through Leah most of the sons will be born.

The promise to Abraham would be many descendents, and Leah would be a huge part of that.

Leah's sons Judah and Levi will lead the nation of Israel.

Levi is father of the Levites, the priests of Israel.

And most important to Christians, Leah gives birth to the line of King David from whom Jesus is descended.

While Jacob loved Rachel because she was beautiful and graceful, Leah is blessed as well even though she is describe by the look of her eyes as *rakkoth (Hebrew)*- weak, vulnerable, tender, but lovely.

The world is more attracted to the Rachels, the graceful, the beautiful, the intelligent, the well-heeled, the wealthy, the winners, the "Blessed" we say, but the ways of God are different.

For the ones in 2nd place somehow make it to first place in the kingdom of God.

Jesus said, "The last shall be first, and the first last in the kingdom of God."

This upside down blessing seems strange.

Our Presbyterian Women Circles will study the *Beattitudes* or "Blessed are" sayings of Jesus in their Bible study this year. I encourage you to be a part of a Circle, a small group where one can grow in study, prayer and service.

Jesus reminds us in the beatitudes that Blessed are the poor, the persecuted, those who mourn...

Sound crazy? Not in the kingdom of God.

My friend Mary Jane was just called as the Interim Pastor of the St. Charles Ave. Presbyterian Church in New Orleans.

The church is located in a place which has experienced seismic change due to hurricane Katrina. Their world has shifted and changed.

We are located in a place which has not seen natural disaster, but collectively we are living through the Great Recession which has affected all of us including the University, local community agencies and businesses, the church, and our families.

Michael Jenkins, the President of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, challenged the church with his beatitudes of leadership. I want to share a couple with you:

In a culture that curses, shouts, complains and spins in conflict, bless blessing. Just turn on the news and talk shows to hear plenty of curses.

As the church, it's when we bless that people notice a family resemblance between us and the God who created us.

I leave you with this challenge, these words from Ephesians 4

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together...promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. Ephesians 4:18-20

May we be the body of Christ in the world, blessing the world with the Good News.

May we build up rather than tear down.

May we give more than we take.

May we bless rather than curse.

By this the world will know us as God's own. Just as we said at Charlie's Baptism this morning,

"See what love God has for us, that God would call us his children, and so we are."

Laura Smith Conrad
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church

1. Michael Jenkins, *Four Beatitudes for Leadership*, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/blog/02-10-2010/michael-jenkins-four-beatitudes-for-leadership>
2. IBID

As always I am thankful for the instruction found in this week's *Journal of Homiletics*.