



## Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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**Genesis 29: 15-28   Romans 8: 26-39   Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52   Psalm 105: 1-11**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

Our OT lessons have been following the stories of patriarchs and matriarchs of the “chosen” people. Before his marriage to Rebekah, Isaac lived in Beer-lahai-roi [**Beer-luhHI-roy**] or nearby in the Negev. When Abraham's servant brought Rebekah from Paddan-aram, Isaac met them, and brought her into his late mother Sarah's tent and married Rebekah. In the lectionary two weeks ago, we heard about the birth of twin sons, Esau and Jacob, to Rebekah (sister of Laban [**lah-BAHN**] the Aramean) and Isaac (2nd son of Abraham). We also got a peek at the rivalry between those very different sons. Esau, the older twin and a skilled hunter, was Isaac's favorite, “but Rebekah loved Jacob.”

Due to a severe drought and famine, the family moved north to Gerar (Land of the Philistines). Isaac farmed successfully until local disputes over water wells required them to move through neighboring valley areas [Esek, Sitnah, and Rehoboth]. Isaac and Rebekah relocated to Beersheba, where God renewed the covenant promise to Isaac. King Abimelech made a treaty of peace. Beersheba was the long-term family base where Esau and Jacob grew up. When Esau was 40, he married 2 local women; Judith the daughter of Beerli [**bee-EE-rye**] the Hittite, and Basemath [**BAHS-uh-maht**] the daughter of Elon the Hittite.

Esau's foreign wives “made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.”<sup>2</sup> Remember that Esau relinquished his inheritance to Jacob when he traded his birthright as the first-born for a bowl of lentil stew.<sup>3</sup> Genesis chapter 27 details how Rebekah successfully conspired with Jacob to also steal Esau's blessing from his father, Isaac. Therefore, Esau hated Jacob and planned to murder him as soon as Isaac was dead. But Rachel heard of Esau's intentions and said to her husband, Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the

<sup>1</sup> BCP, Proper 28 by Thomas Cranmer

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 26:35

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 25:29-34

Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman such as these, what good will my life be to me?"

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. Go at once to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, land that God gave to Abraham." Thus, Isaac sent Jacob away.

Last week's reading was the beginning of Jacob's journey. It recalled his dream of angels climbing up and down a ladder to heaven. Jacob marked the location with a stone then made a bargain with God.<sup>4</sup> Today's reading from Genesis comes after Jacob's first-time seeing Rachel and being overwhelmed by her beauty. That story is uncannily similar to the meeting of his mother, Rebekah and Abraham's unnamed servant who had been sent to find a wife for Jacob's father, Isaac.<sup>5</sup>

Today we learn what happened in Paddan-aram after Jacob met Rachel's father Laban and had stayed with the family for a month. Hospitality in that part of the world was, and is, an important cultural value. I think we understand hospitality for a family member, especially if the visitor is a potential husband for your daughter. As the story progresses, it becomes more difficult for me to hear. Chauvinism in that place and time has persisted through the millennia in many cultures, including our own.

'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 to Laban, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban replied, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." Jacob served 7 years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.'

Do you remember being set up for "blind dates?" Describing the elder sister, Leah, as having "lovely eyes" is the modern equivalent of "Leah has a great personality!" For those of us who are waiting for Jacob to get his come-uppance for the deceitful things he and his mother did to Esau and to his blind, aged father, Isaac, it is coming soon. Jacob may think he's a good negotiator, but he has met his match in Laban. Experience and treachery will always overcome youth and skill!<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 28:10-22

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 24:15-28

<sup>6</sup> Playwright David Mamet frequently used the variation, "Old age and treachery will always beat youth and exuberance."

After 7 years working for Laban, Jacob said, “Give me my wife.” Laban agreed to do so, but because in that culture, the elder daughter must marry before the younger ones, Laban did a daughter switcheroo! Jacob did not know until morning that the marriage had been consummated with Leah instead of Rachael. Jacob was angry and mortified. Then Laban said to Jacob, “Complete the week with Leah, and we will give you Rachel also in return for serving me another seven years.” Jacob stayed the week with Leah; then Laban gave him Rachel as a wife. Jacob had another bitter surprise coming. He loved Rachel more than Leah, and when the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

Genesis Ch. 30 gets VERY complicated! Leah bore the first 4 of Jacob’s sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah;<sup>7</sup> then she ceased bearing. Rachel was jealous that Leah had given Jacob 4 sons. Rachael gave her maid Bilhah to Jacob and Bilhah bore Jacob 2 sons, Dan and Naphtali.<sup>8</sup> Gad and Asher were Leah’s sons by proxy through her maid Zilpah. Then Leah gave birth to Issachar, Zebulun, and a daughter, Dinah [DEE-nahr]. Dinah was the seventh of Leah’s and Jacob’s biological children, and the only daughter mentioned by name. “Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb.” And Rachel bore Joseph and Benjamin. God renamed Jacob “Israel” because he was the father of the male children who became leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Before you begin to study the Gospel lesson from Mt 13 appointed for today, please read today’s Epistle [Romans 8:26-39]. The Holy Spirit moving in us allows for interpretation and encourages personal perspective. When you open your senses and give your mind room to speculate, interesting things often happen to stimulate and activate the imagination. If you imagine something, think about how it might happen. Then ask yourself, “What does this parable mean to me?”

Jesus uses 6 parables to teach the crowd about the kingdom of heaven. The first two similes might best be directed to agricultural workers. They describe tiny beginnings that develop into big things. The kingdom of heaven is like: 1)...a mustard seed. The tiniest of seeds that become trees so large [30-40 ft. tall] that the birds make nests in the branches.<sup>9</sup> The kingdom of heaven is like: 2)...yeast mixed into 3 measures of flour [~45 lbs.] until it is all leavened. That would be enough flour for 75 to 85 1 lb. loaves of bread.

The next two examples are about seeking, finding, and acquiring. It is entrepreneurial commerce. Remember, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”<sup>10</sup> What you care about most is where you will spend your time and energy. The kingdom of

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<sup>7</sup> Genesis 29:32-35

<sup>8</sup> As Sarah’s maid Hagar had been given to Abraham to produce a son, Ishmael, the older half-brother of Isaac

<sup>9</sup> Not to be confused with mustard greens which are edible leafy plants with yellow flowers.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:21, Sermon on the Mount.

heaven is like: 3)...treasure hidden in a field, which someone found, then in his joy sold all that he had to buy that field. The kingdom of heaven is like: 4)...a merchant in search of fine pearls who sells all that he has to buy one pearl of great value.

The last parable would make sense to fishermen: The kingdom of heaven is like: 5)...fish of every kind caught in a net, hauled to the beach and sorted – the edible fish into baskets, the inedible fish into the fire. I hope those fishermen would have mixed rejected fish and fish bits with charcoal to make fertilizer for the fields, as Mayflower Pilgrims learned to do from the indigenous peoples.<sup>11</sup>

After telling these parables, Jesus asked, “Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” A clergy friend suggested that their ‘Yes’ might have been more like ‘Suuure...’ And Jesus said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like 6)...the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” Scribes were experts in Jewish law and Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus had declared, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”<sup>12</sup> He instructs his listeners; don’t overwhelm your audience. Take baby steps with them. Reaffirm old truths from the Law and help to interpret them in new ways. Parables are open to more than one interpretation. That is the joy of them! Look at every angle. Look at all of the facets. Turn them upside down and inside out. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them.

Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> [Wampanoag Confederacy](#), taught settlers how to use rotting fish as fertilizer for poor, rocky soil.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 5:17

## **Birth Order and Mothers of Isaac's sons**

- **Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah** – Born to Leah
- **Dan, Naphtali** – Born to Bilhah (Rachel's maid)
- **Gad, Asher** – Born to Zilpah (Leah's maid)
- **Issachar, Zebulun** – Born to Leah
- **Joseph, Benjamin**<sup>13</sup> – Born to Rachel

## **Parables About the Kingdom of Heaven and where to find them in the Bible**

- **The Parable of the Sower** – Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-9, 13-20; Luke 8:4-8, 11-15
- **The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares** – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
- **The Parable of the Mustard Seed** – Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19
- **The Parable of the Leaven** – Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21
- **The Parable of the Hidden Treasure** – Matthew 13:44
- **The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price** – Matthew 13:45-46
- **The Parable of the Dragnet** – Matthew 13:47-50
- **The Parable of the Growing Seed** – Mark 4:26-29

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<sup>13</sup> Genesis 35:16-20, Rachel died during a difficult labor on the road to Ephrath (modern-day Bethlehem). With her final breath, she named her son Ben-oni ("son of my sorrow"). Jacob renamed him Benjamin.