

Message from Robin+

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.
Genesis 29:15-18

"When morning came, it was Leah!" I've been sitting with the Hebrew scripture passage for this week and this is the line that stands out for me. So much is going on in this passage that I had to get the backstory, the history, to figure out what was happening in the moment I was reading about, and how it would affect what would happen in the future.

I've always said Genesis is the most interesting book in the Bible. If you need some good vacation reading, filled with the seven deadly sins, rich characters, and lots of action, try Genesis! It is truly a slice of humanity, reminding us that we are all merely human.

Jacob and Esau were twins, who wrestled with one another in their mother Rebecca's womb. Esau was born first, but Jacob was grabbing at his heel. In fact, his name means *one who grasps*. As they grew, Esau became the favorite of his father Isaac, while Jacob was Rebecca's favorite. As you might guess, this led to some complicated family behaviors. Esau, focused on his individual need, his hunger, traded away his birthright to his younger brother Jacob for a bowl of stew.

When Isaac was dying, he asked Esau his elder son to bring him a bowl of stew to eat so that he might then bless Esau, thereby passing along to him all the inheritance that comes along with the blessing. But Rebecca heard this and told Jacob to take the stew to Isaac and to pretend to be Esau so that he might receive the blessing. This was not difficult as Isaac was blind. There are more great details to this story (Genesis 25-29) so you should read it, but in the end, Jacob does receive the blessing. When Isaac discovers he's been tricked he's furious and ready to kill Jacob. So Jacob runs away to his uncle Laban's to give Esau time to cool off.

On the way to Haran, Jacob has a dream one night of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending this ladder, and in the dream God promised Jacob that God would be with him always.

When Jacob gets to Haran he meets Laban's daughter Rachel at the well and falls in love with her. He agrees to work for Laban for seven years in order to have Rachel as his bride. But on the wedding night, Jacob the trickster is tricked by Laban, who substitutes Rachel's older sister Leah in the marriage tent. And here is where we are in this week's lectionary text.

What are we willing to trade for a bowl of stew? How will we respond when our expectations are not met? Can we trust that God is with us always? Can we see that sometimes we are Jacob and sometimes Esau; that sometimes it is Leah and sometimes it is Rachel; and that in it all God is with us and working out greater purposes than we can see in the moment?

These are good questions to ponder in a pandemic when we can sometimes put our individual needs ahead of the needs of others, when we sometimes forget that God has a greater plan. I love that this story shows us how God works within a family, even when the focus is on the stew instead of the kingdom.

They are also good questions to consider as we regather for worship next week on August 2. You might arrive expecting Rachel but you are going to find Leah! Things will be very different so it will be helpful for you to read the information for how we will regather that can be found elsewhere in this week's eNews. Remember that God has promised to be with us, even if we cannot sing or have communion just yet, even if we have to sit in a different pew, even if there is no coffee hour or choir or Sunday school. Even if we must wear masks and remain six feet apart. Worship in the days ahead, like the seven years Jacob served Laban, will seem to us but a few days because of the love we have for God and for one another.

Each church is like a family and we all have our stew and our tricksters and our Rachels and Leahs. No two families are exactly alike; each has its challenges, gifts, and resources. We are all doing the best that we can in this moment, both in our personal families and as a church family. I am thankful for the support of the Vestry and our Regathering Team and their amazing work to return the congregation to worship in our building in a safe manner, following the guidelines of both our Governor and our Bishop. I believe we can do this and how we do this determines who we are as a faith community. We are on the timeline that works best for our members, leadership, and volunteers. If you have any questions or concerns, I welcome them – please contact me.

And when you wake up in the morning and "it's Leah!" trust that God is at work and has promised never to leave you.