

Midweek Meditation, December 2, 2020, week of November 29

Genesis 29:1-14

You may remember from last week, we talked about how Jacob was on his way to Abraham's homeland. He was headed to the town of Haran, a town named after Abraham's brother. This was the place where Rebekah's brother, Laban, was from. Our story picks up from the time right after Jacob's dream about a stairway to heaven. Jacob arrives at his destination and he sees a well with three flocks of sheep lying nearby. These shepherds and their sheep were gathered here because this is the place where they water their herds. The well had a great stone over the opening. So, when all of the shepherds arrived with their flocks, the stone would be removed from the well in order to care for all of the sheep.

When Jacob arrived at the well, he asked the shepherds who were gathered there, "My brothers, where are you from?" They reply, "We are from Haran." And, that is good news to Jacob. It means that he has arrived at his destination. So, he asked them if they know his uncle, Laban. And they told Jacob that they knew Laban. So, he asked them, "Is my uncle well?" They say, "Yes, he is well." And, as they are speaking, the shepherds that Jacob is talking to, point out that Laban's daughter, Rachel, who is a shepherdess, is approaching the well as they speak.

Then Jacob does something that is interesting. He says to the shepherds who are standing with him at the well, "The sun is still high. It is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Why are standing around the well. Why don't you just take the stone away from the well, water your sheep, and then be on your way."

It is interesting to me that Jacob, who is not a shepherd, and who is not from this land, comes up to a well where he has never been before, and is talking to people who he had never met, and he tells them how to do their job.

The shepherds tell Jacob, "We can't water the sheep. We are going to wait until all the sheep are gathered, and then the stone will be rolled away from the mouth of the well, and then we will water the sheep."

Now we don't really know whether the stone is not removed from the well, because they need more help to move the stone, or if it is just a friendly community agreement, that the shepherds, each day, wait until all have gathered, or if they are just trying to preserve the freshness or the security of their water supply by only opening it once a day. But Jacob clearly thinks that to wait for all is kind of silly. It is a big waste of time for people to be sitting here killing time for the magic moment to open the well for the day.

As they are having this conversation, Rachel walked up with Laban's sheep. Jacob took one look at Rachel, and I think that he knew that this was the one, of Laban's daughters, that he wanted to take as his wife. I think that he was trying to impress her from the start. He saw her there, with her sheep, and his response was to go to the well, and roll the great stone away from the opening, and to water his uncle's sheep. Rolling the stone away seems like a big job, because the other shepherds chose only to do it once a day, after all had gathered. But Jacob was moved to do it all by himself. But he didn't do it for his uncle. He did it for Rachel. He was showing off for a beautiful woman. Some things don't change over the generations of time. After he finished watering her sheep, he turned to Rachel and kissed her and wept aloud. And the reason that he became emotional was, first, because he was taken by Rachel's

beauty, but also because I think he believed that God had shown him the one that he was supposed to take as his wife.

Jacob explained to Rachel that he was a relative of Laban, her father. I think that it is safe to say that by now, Rachel knew why Jacob was in Haran; to find a wife from among the people of his homeland. And the fact that he had kissed her, and become emotional upon meeting her, gave her a pretty good indication that she was at least in the running as a candidate to be his wife. And it appears that that prospect makes her happy.

So, Rachel runs off and tells her father, Laban, about all of the things that had happened at the well. When Laban hears about the arrival of his nephew, he remembers how much of “God’s blessing” that his family received when his sister, Rebekah, was taken as a wife for Jacob’s father, Isaac. And it seems clear that Laban would certainly be open to the possibility of receiving more of this family’s “blessing” in exchange for his daughter, Rachel. So, he rushes out to meet his nephew, who he very likely had never seen before. Laban greets Jacob and welcomes him into his home.

It is interesting to think about the parallels between the time when Rebekah was betrothed, and now, when Jacob comes to town, looking for a wife from this family. Both of the stories begin at the well. Both Rebekah and Rachel came to the well, and that is where they met the member of this family that they would eventually become a part of. Both Rebekah and Rachel ran off to tell their families about the visitors from the family of Abraham.

You will remember that it was Abraham’s servant that came to town so many years ago looking for a wife for Isaac. I think that Jacob, and Abraham’s servant, both have the same heart in these stories. They both have an honest and earnest desire to discern the will of God. Jacob is fresh off of his life changing dream about the stairway that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven. Abraham’s servant was earnestly trying to be true to an oath that he had sworn to Abraham. Both got emotional when they believed that God had shown them which woman he had ordained to marry into the family of Abraham. Jacob wept aloud, and Abraham’s servant bowed down and worshipped, and praised God.

But we are going to see in the next lesson, that Laban has a little bit different idea about how this arrangement is going to be finalized. Rebekah left with Abraham’s servant the very next day. It is going to take significantly more time and much more sacrifice for Jacob to realize God’s will and to further God’s plan, and for Rachel to be a wife to Jacob. It is going to be harder for Jacob that it was when Rebekah was joined in marriage to Isaac. And part of the complication for Jacob that was not in play with Isaac is that Jacob loved Rachel, and was willing to sacrifice in order to be united with Rachel. Isaac had never even met Rebekah until she returned to Canaan as his betrothed. And we will also see in the next lesson, Laban, Jacob’s uncle is more than happy to take advantage of Jacob’s deep desire for his second oldest daughter Rachel.

If you want to see how this story proceeds from here, you will have to tune in next week

For now, let us pray...