

Midweek Meditation January 7, 2020

Genesis 29:31-30:24

The last meditation we had, you may remember, was where Jacob travels to the land of his ancestors, partly to find a wife from the people of his ancestors, and partly because he is fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau. Almost immediately upon his arrival in the land of his homeland, he meets Rachel, and he loves Rachel. Rachel's father was Jacob's uncle, Rebekah's brother, and Jacob asked his uncle, Laban, for the hand of Rachel. But Laban saw an opportunity to take advantage of Jacob's desire to marry his daughter. Jacob volunteered to work for his uncle, Laban, for 7 years in exchange for the hand of his daughter, Rachel. But Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his eldest daughter, Leah, and working 7 years for her, and then he was asked to work another 7 years for the hand of Rachel. The place where we pick up the story today, is during that 14 years that Jacob labored for the hand of Rachel.

Now we have to understand, Laban did not care about his daughters, or his nephew. He cared about his power, and his wealth, and his standing. If he did care about his daughters, he would not have pitted them one against the other in contention for the affection of Jacob. He forced one daughter to marry a man who was in love with her sister. And he forced his other daughter to enter a marriage where she was in competition with her sister for the affection of her husband. And he put his nephew through 14 years labor, taking advantage of his

daughters for financial gain, and trying to squeeze every bit of advantage that he could take from the fact the Jacob was willing to do almost anything in order to be with Rachel. What comes next is the story of the children that were born to Jacob and his new wives. And as we found out in reading this passage, the awful situation that was set up by Laban's greed plays out in a terrible contest between Rachel and Leah for the affection of their husband Jacob. Leah bears several children first, and each time, she hopes with all of her heart, that presenting a child to Jacob would cause Jacob to love her in the same way he loved Rachel. And as we will find out, that hope, which was deeply seated in Leah's heart, will never find its fulfillment. Rachel, as it turns out, in the tradition of those chosen by God to accompany the descendants of Abraham, is barren. She is barren just like Sarah was, and just like Rebekah was. And after Jacob and Leah become parents of several children, Rachel is angry and heartbroken and most of all, envious of her sister, who had provided Jacob, the one that she loved, three boys, who would perhaps carry on the line of her husband, Jacob. And it is very interesting, Rachel comes to Jacob, and says to him, you have to give me children, or I will die. And Jacob says, "Am I in the place of God who has kept you from having children?" After reflecting on the fact that her husband could do nothing to help her problem, she, just like Sarah, several generations before her, she offered up her maid servant, and Jacob had union with her. And by the maid servant, Bilhah, Jacob was given another child, and as a

response, Rachel says, God had vindicated me. But the power struggle continued between Leah and Rachel for 14 years. What could have been a magical love relationship between Jacob and Rachel was turned into an awful power struggle. An awful triangle of envy and hurt feeling, and the feeling of not being valued, or loved; Involving not only those three, but the maid servants and the children, and the people in the communities around them.

The one thing that is missing from this whole painful series of events is trust in God. Jacob could have learned from his father's example. When Rebekah, Jacob's mother, went to Isaac, Jacob's father, and lamented the fact that God had not provided her a child, Rebekah did not give Isaac a maidservant, and Isaac did not become angry and blame God. Instead of trying to take matters into their own hands, Isaac prayed, and then waited, and then the Lord provided.

Eventually, God did provide for Jacob and Rachel. Right near the end of that 14-year nightmare, the scripture says that "God remembered Rachel. He listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." She named him Joseph.

Now, I did not go through all of the names of all of the sons of Jacob, but as we know, this family is the very foundation of the nation Israel. Eventually all of the tribes of Israel would be named after, and would be heir to the offspring of this very imperfect and dysfunctional family.

God took what emerged from this totally dysfunctional and imperfect family, and eventually transformed Jacob and Rachel, Leah and Joseph and all of his brothers into the patriarchs of our faith. So if God can transform this family in such a glorious way, why can't God transform your life and my life into something miraculous in the name of the Lord.

As we also know, Joseph is Jacob's favorite, because he is the only son of his beloved Rachel. From Joseph came Moses who led the people of Israel out of Egyptian captivity and finally to the place where God's promise would be fulfilled. The people Israel would be transformed from living as aliens in the promised land to the place where they took possession of the land of Israel. Our next meditation will be about how Jacob finally escapes the manipulative clutches of his uncle and heads back to the nations Israel. Let us Pray.