

Scripture Readings and Sermon

July 26, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Genesis 29:15–28 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

After the revelation of God to Jacob at Bethel, Jacob vows that if God is with him then he will accept the LORD as his God and give him a tenth (tithe) back to God. Note that God never asked Jacob for a vow. After this vow, Jacob traveled until he met those who knew of Laban. It was at a water well that Jacob encountered Rachel, "a shepherdess", just as the servant of Isaac encountered Rebekah (Genesis 24:13) and later Moses would encounter the daughters of the priest of Midian (Exodus 2:16). After Jacob rolls away the stone from the well, he kisses Rachel and is then brought back to meet his uncle Laban. Since Jacob can not claim his inheritance until after he is married, he must offer labor as a bride price for Rachel. It is now Jacob's turn to be fooled when he sleeps with with Rachel's older sister instead of Rachel. This has less to do with lighting and more to do with the custom of marriage veils and the fact that the "feast" in Hebrew means drinking party. After a week, Jacob is then married to Rachel and works for another seven years. Just as Jacob competed with Esau for Isaac's favor, so to did Rachel and Leah compete for Jacob's favor by bearing children. While Leah gave Jacob children, Rachel like Sarah offered Jacob her servant Bilhah. In response to Bilhah's children, Leah offered Jacob her servant Zilpah who also had children. Finally after ten sons and a daughter Dinah, Rachel gave birth to Joseph (Genesis 30:24).

Genesis 29:25 "Why then have you deceived me?"

The deceiver is deceived! Is it surprising that Rebekah's brother deceived Jacob after Rebekah helped Jacob deceive Isaac?

Have you ever witnessed dysfunction in a family? Did they ever overcome the pattern?

When have you been deceived or had your past come back?

Can you appreciate Leah's position? Rachel's? What about Laban?

Commentary on Romans 8:26–39 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

It is no longer through Levitical sacrifices but rather through the Holy Spirit that our prayers of intercession come to heaven. The Spirit replaces the work of the Law because Jesus satisfied the demands of the Law. God opened (called) the hearts of those who were ready (predestined) to receive by faith the good news of Jesus (justified). Through faith, they receive the Holy Spirit which conforms their will toward the will of God (glorified) and thereby become conformed to the image of Jesus. Welsey affirms that predestined does not refer to who but rather how. While all are called, it is predestined that only those who respond by faith will be conformed. Salvation by faith alone is predestined while all are called to respond by faith in the offer made by Jesus for God so loved "the world" and not just a few. If God loves the world and all are called, than what can stop the saving work of God? If by faith, we are saved than can the flesh or the law thwart God's plan? Nothing, not even our own sinful nature can change the life giving salvation of God in Jesus Christ if we respond by faith.

Romans 8:31 If God is for us, who is against us?

Do you believe that God is for us? Do you have faith even in tribulation?

How do you interpret "predestined"?

What is the Love of God in Jesus Christ?

Which is more important - prosperity or love?

What does it mean to you to have the assurance of God's love?

Commentary on Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

While the parables of the seeds in different soil and the wheat and weeds address the word of God in the hearts of people, these shorter parables address the importance of the kingdom of heaven hidden behind worldly priorities. The kingdom appears insignificant like a mustard seed or a pinch of yeast in a larger batch of flour but it has the potential to grow beyond its perceived value. That value is hidden like a treasure buried in a field, a pearl inside of a clam, or fish swimming below the surface. It is only when a person buys the field, seeks the pearl, or casts the net that the true treasure is revealed. This is not a simple task for many fish will have to be discarded and all will have to be given up to buy the field but the apparently insignificant treasure transforms life. All of these parables are meant to change the way people view their priorities. Beginning with the different types of soil, individual's must first be receptive to God's word and not hardened by tradition. They must not be too quick to judge the value of a thing like a mustard seed or a pinch of yeast because if they judge poorly they may uproot the wheat with the weeds. Rather they should give all their resources (field), time (pearl), and effort (nets) to seeking God's hidden word.

Matthew 13:31 "The kingdom of heaven is like ... "

Have you ever discovered that something, you at first thought was insignificant, ended up changing your life?

When did hearing the word of God change your world?

Is your faith something you would give up everything for?

What is the kingdom of heaven (God's presence) like for you?

Sermon "True Love" ([Sermon Video](#))

If you are feeling stressed, it is not surprising. Daily, we find ourselves in the middle of a battlefield with various sides battling for our attention. Jobs and families, local issues and national politics, threat of virus and economic collapse, all of these demand our attention, our time, and our resources. Like Jacob caught between his love (Rachel) and tradition (Leah), we find ourselves caught in the middle. There is no way to fully please one without denying the other and so our life is a balancing act. Our hearts are broken and divided with various players jockeying for position on our list of priorities like horses on derby day. Meanwhile, quietly and patiently waiting is God who simply wants us to leave this divided world and come home.

The truth is we can never truly love others until we find the deepest source of all love in God. We were made to be loved and to love God. We were predestined with the image of God in our souls to never be complete until we find wholeness in God. Only through the gift of the Holy Spirit given in love by God can we be conformed to the image of the Son and find the wholeness we were created to live. God calls to us in the midst of our stress and division to find wholeness in Christ. The love of Christ poured out on the cross pulls together our scattered hearts and aligns that heart, justifies that heart with the heart of God. Out of this center, the Holy Spirit then teaches and enables us to live more fully in the world. Grounded in God's love, we are no longer pulled apart but rather are fully present to our families, our jobs, our community, our nation, and the pressing issues of the day. With the help of God, all things are possible.

The question remains, however, how do we get from a divided and stressed world to a centered world where life can be found in abundance. The more we try, the more we fail to be all things to all people. The more we give to one, the less we seem to have for others. Our store house of energy is limited and we are quickly spent. We may know that our treasure lies in Christ but we have neither the time nor the resources to "give all that we have" to buy the field or the pearl of great price. Even a mustard seed of faith or a pinch of yeast belief seems unattainable. Without God's grace, it is impossible.

The first step to life is death. Death to the attitude that we are the captains of our own faith.

Death to the myth of "I did it my way". Death to all of those cultural cliches that pretend that we are gods. We are nothing more and nothing less than human. We succeed and fail on a regular basis and sometimes at the same time. My way and my captain is a lonely and self-centered way to live. Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps is find if you could only find your boots. We are not gods. We are mortal and we are incredibly frail. It is only by accepting this and letting our pride die that we begin to look up and see the hand of help being offered.

When God looks upon us, God sees past our brokenness and frailty to see the treasured children we were created to become. Like a net, God cast his love in Jesus over the world to gather in all. Seeing the treasure of our souls, Jesus gave all on the cross crack open every oyster shell heart and buy the fields of our lives. By God's prevenient grace, the Holy Spirit has given us the power to say yes to God's offer even if that quiet yes is as small as a mustard seed or as little as a pinch of yeast. And so, it because of God's love that we can leave the division of our crazy world and find the beauty of creation. For grounded in the true love of God, we find that our cup overflows.

Genesis 29:15–28, Romans 8:26–39, Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

Recorded on July 21, 2020

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