

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany – Pr. Faugstad sermon
Genesis 29:13-30: “Your Savior Sees Your Troubles.”
January 19, 2025 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank You, that by Your grace You have instituted holy matrimony, in which You keep us from unchastity, and other offenses: We beseech You to send Your blessing upon every husband and wife, that they may not provoke each other to anger and strife, but live peaceably together in love and godliness, receive Your gracious help in all temptations, and raise their children in accordance with Your will. Grant that we all might walk before You in purity and holiness, put our trust in You, and lead such lives on earth, that in the world to come we may have everlasting life, through Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 150)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the twenty-ninth chapter of the Book of Genesis. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month. / Then 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 older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel. And 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 female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) And in the morning, behold, 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, "It is not so done in our country, to give 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 to be his wife. (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who walked a lonely road and suffered for our griefs, sorrows, and sins, so we would be assured of His help in our trials, dear fellow redeemed:

Jacob didn't know – he couldn't have known – that when he traveled to Haran, he was walking right into a great web, a terrible sticky web. He would soon find himself wrapped up in such cares and troubles that he wondered if he would ever be free again. When he first made contact with his mother's relatives, he was filled with joy. He was blissfully unaware that a spider watched his every move, a spider watching, waiting, scheming. That spider was Laban, his mother's brother, his own uncle.

Jacob went there because his mother wanted to save him from the wrath of his brother Esau after Jacob received the family blessing instead of Esau. Jacob's parents sent him to find a wife among his relatives. As he set off on his journey toward Haran, he stopped for the night at a place called Luz. This was in the same area where the LORD appeared to Abram when he first arrived in the land of Canaan. As Jacob slept, he dreamed about a ladder reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it.

And the LORD spoke to him, promising that his offspring would be *"like the dust of the earth,"* and that *"all the families of the earth [would] be blessed"* through him (Gen. 28:14). *"Behold, I am with you,"* said the LORD, *"and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land"* (v. 15). They were wonderful promises, but at the present Jacob had nothing. He had no wife, no home, and no great possessions. When he got to Haran, he was just poor Jacob trying to find a wife.

As we heard in today's lesson, his uncle Laban received him warmly. He *"embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house."* Jacob couldn't have been happier, and he gladly helped his uncle however he could. Laban recognized his good work ethic and thought it would be useful to keep Jacob around for a while. *"Tell me, what shall your wages be?"* asked Laban. Jacob had come to his uncle's place for a very specific purpose, and of Laban's two daughters, one of them caught his eye. He said, *"I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."*

Now do you suppose Rachel was flattered and excited about this, or somewhat offended? In our culture, marriages are not arranged by the parents. We expect marriages to be by the free and mutual consent of a man and a woman – with no business strings attached. The culture in Haran was different. There it seems that the father had the authority to give a daughter in marriage to whomever he wanted, and his daughter did not question that decision.

This did not automatically mean the marriage would be unhappy. Many cultures around the world still have arranged marriages. Studies have shown that these marriages may even last longer than marriages for love. While we would hardly adopt this approach in our families, it is very important for Christian parents to approve of the spouses their children decide to marry. When this does not happen, there are bumpy roads ahead!

As far as we can tell, Rachel was okay with the arrangement to marry Jacob. He certainly loved her. In a line too mushy for middle school boys, we are told that the seven years Jacob served for Rachel *"seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her."* The time couldn't go fast enough for Jacob, but it went too fast for Laban.

You see, Laban saw what kind of worker he had in Jacob. And that old spider thought to himself, *"If I spin a little deception, what can Jacob do about it? He came here with nothing. He*

has no one to stand up for him. I know how I can keep him under my thumb for a while longer....” So he put his older daughter Leah in the marriage bed instead of Rachel and arranged things so that Jacob would not know until after they had come together. “You can have Rachel, too,” said Laban, “If you serve me for seven more years.”

That’s how we arrive at a godly man with two wives, sisters, with the younger one favored over the older one and making sure big sister knew it. And a deceitful father-in-law who treated his son-in-law like a slave. And Jacob not knowing who he could trust and wondering how and when he would ever get back home.

There is much unhappiness in this saga. This isn’t the way Jacob imagined it when he saw the angels of God going up and down the ladder from heaven and heard the LORD’s promises. This isn’t the way he imagined it when his uncle first welcomed him to Haran. This isn’t the way he imagined it when he prepared to marry the woman he loved. Nothing had gone the way he planned.

For these reasons, Jacob is a helpful example for us —because each of us here has also had to go through troubles and trials that we did not anticipate, had to adjust our plans because life did not go like we imagined. Maybe like Jacob, you fell deeply in love with someone and could only see happiness ahead, but then something happened to change the relationship, and the future you saw so clearly faded. Maybe you thought marriage would be easy, but it tested you to your very limits. Maybe you found yourself under your boss’s thumb and didn’t know how to get away or didn’t think you could afford to.

When we have been hurt, sometimes we draw inside ourselves and put up a hard shell to try to protect ourselves from the pain. Sometimes we lash out at the person who hurt us or at innocent bystanders who caught us at just the wrong time. Sometimes we let our anger build up inside and maybe even plot our revenge, hoping that the person who hurt us, someday, somehow, will learn how it feels.

This bitterness can happen in a marriage. It can happen between siblings. It can happen between a parent and a child. It can happen with friends and co-workers and neighbors. The devil wants this to happen. He wants to break up marriages and families and friendships. He wants us to think selfishly, to dwell on our hurts, to never forget a wrong, and to quickly give up on something that God intended for our good.

God gives marriage, family, and friendship for our good. The reason these things go haywire is not because He fails us but because we are sinners. Each one of us brings sin into our marriages, our families, and our friendships. The neighbors who should concern us the most, the ones who are closest to us—even in our own home—these are the ones who have often gotten the worst of our sinning. They have been on the receiving end of our prideful behavior, our hurtful words, our selfish actions. They have seen us behave less like faithful Jacob and more like deceitful Laban.

Where do we take the pain that others have caused us, the deep hurts from broken promises, failed expectations, shattered dreams? Where do we take the guilt for our own mistakes and failures, the recognition that we have not been for others what we should have been? We take

all this guilt and shame and pain to the One who came to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows (Isa. 53:4).

Jacob looked to this One also, which is how he was sustained in his troubles. Jacob believed that a Savior was coming, even from his own line. And in a strange twist that only God could see, this Savior did not come as Jacob expected from his union with Rachel. The Savior came from his union with Leah! God knows how to work blessings even out of times of trial. We have another example of this in the Holy Gospel for today, where for His first public sign Jesus turned water into wine to bring joy to a marriage celebration (Joh. 2:1-11).

He still does that now. No matter what you have gone through in your marriage, your family, and your friendships—or what you are still going through—Jesus brings you His blessings. He is present here today to forgive you the sins you have committed against those He called you to care for. He is here to take the burdens of your guilt about the past, your struggles in the present, and your worries about the future. He picks you up and covers you in His mercy and grace as you listen to His promises and prepare to receive His body and blood given and shed for you. *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,”* He says, *“and I will give you rest”* (Mat. 11:28).

Your Savior Sees Your Troubles. Even before you were born, He saw you and what you would go through in your life. It was for you that He endured every sort of trouble on earth and for you that He went to the cross. No trial that you have to face is stronger than His love for you. There are more blessings ahead for you because He is with you.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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