

Genesis 29: 15-28 & Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 – Sermon by Richard Shreeve, 26/07/20

In our Old Testament Lesson for this morning: Jacob the trickster gets tricked. Previously Jacob had literally ruined and wrecked his life. He had deceived and lied to his father to steal the blessing and inheritance from his brother Esau. Esau had threatened his life, and now Jacob was on the run. But the most wonderful thing had happened to Jacob: He saw God's Stairway to Heaven!

He had experienced an encounter with the Living God. God had confronted Jacob, and led him to make a new commitment--a vow that the Lord, the God of redemption and salvation, would always be His God! He gave Jacob a new life, a new beginning, a fresh start, a brand new day to live! Immediately after Jacob had his encounter with God, Jacob began to search for what was to become his new family!

There is always joy when we are converted and begin a new life, or make a new commitment to God. And when this happens to us, we need to do exactly what Jacob did. We need to search for our new family--the family of God, the family of the church. Because we need each other's fellowship, help, and encouragement! We need to join together in studying God's Word, in our service and witness for the Lord!

As the Bible says in Hebrews 10:25: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another." Think of a campfire. When all the logs are placed together properly... each log contributes to the fire and continues to burn. When you take one of the logs away from the fire...what happens to that log? It goes out doesn't it? The same goes for the Christian....there is no such thing as a successful, lone Christian! We must stay together, fellowship together, learn from each other, and burn brightly together if we are going to survive.

If there is any one thing we should learn from this pandemic is that we cannot go it alone. Phil did not just sit back and say that's it I am redundant until we get the all clear. He put his thinking cap on to find ways of getting the Christian message to his flock. First, he brought out the weekly sermon on paperback, delivered to every one of his parishioners' houses. Then with the help of others he improved on this by getting a complete service streamed to those who had internet. Finally, for those without internet, produced the service on disc. No, it is not the same as being in church together but we still felt united in worship as we watched listened and sang together albeit in our own homes.

Let's return again to Jacob. Laban, the brother of Rebekah, the grandson of Nahor, was overjoyed to welcome one of his own flesh and blood and perhaps Laban was impressed by the strength of Jacob, and thought he might make a good shepherd. And almost certainly, Laban considered Jacob to be a possible husband for one of his two daughters. Leah and Rachel were both eligible, and Laban never missed an opportunity to drive a hard bargain. Jacob was smitten with one of Laban's two daughter's Rachel. Rachel was unusually beautiful and attractive. On the other hand, Leah, the elder sister, wasn't so attractive. Her eyes lacked a certain lustre and sparkle. The Scripture simply says that Leah "had weak eyes."

Anyway, "Jacob was in love with Rachel", and he made an agreement to work for Laban for 7 years in return for Rachel's hand in marriage. Now, it's true that Laban was offering Jacob both a home and a job when Jacob desperately need both. So, Jacob worked seven long, hard years for Rachel, but they were joyful years! The years seemed like only a few days because of the great love he had for her.

People often wonder if a goal is worth the wait. In our instant society, waiting for anything is seldom encouraged. The most important goals and desires are worth waiting for. Patience is hardest when we need it most, but it is the key to achieving our goals.

In our Gospel lesson that was read earlier Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven “is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought it.” Have we sold all we have in order to obtain the kingdom of heaven? Are we willing to do anything in order to get it? If not, we ought to re-evaluate how much we love God. Do we love God enough to do anything in order to inherit eternal life with Him? Do we love God enough in order to follow Jesus into the back-alleys and worn-out buildings of our city in order to reach the lost for Christ? Let’s not get tricked by the master trickster himself, Satan. Remember: “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them in to the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Now, after 7 years of hard work, there was a shocking interruption to Jacob’s joy! Jacob had been deceived! Jacob reaped exactly what he had sown back home among his father and brother! On the wedding night, Jacob gets an unexpected wedding present--Rachel’s sister Leah! How did Laban pull off such a scheme? How was this possible? How could Jacob not know? Back in Jacob’s time, there was a custom of heavily veiling the bride on her wedding night. After being heavily veiled, the bride was presented to the bridegroom after darkness had fallen. Therefore, it is not surprising that Jacob discovers the trick Laban played on him only when the morning came. When Jacob woke up on the morning after his wedding with Leah rather than Rachel he must have been more than a little surprised and upset!

A lot of men might have said, “Forget it! I’m not going to work another 7 years for Rachel,” and then stormed off! But Jacob loved her, and she alone was the prize that he sought!

What do we love the most? What is the prize that we seek?

Remember our Gospel lesson: Jesus tells us, “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” Jesus doesn’t tell us how long or how hard we are going to have to search for that pearl. Jacob kept his focus on the one he loved, not the 7 additional years of labour. Nor the injustice of his father-in law! It can be so easy for us to become frustrated with the church and just quit. The world is literally littered with Christians who have given up the faith when obstacles have gotten in their way. If we focus on the expectations we have from others we will definitely be disappointed at some point in our Christian journey. If we focus on the promises of God, we will finish the race and obtain the prize! Jacob kept Leah even after he was able to finally marry Rachel and Leah became the mother of Jacob’s first four sons which includes Levi and Judah who is the ancestor of David and his royal line, and ultimately of Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord! It’s amazing how things work out for those who love God and are called according to His purpose!

Jacob began his life as a deceitful trickster he had been on the run for his life but God had mercy on him and God revealed Himself to Him and God gave Jacob a new life! And Jacob kept the promise he had made with God. Even when the going got rough Jacob was able to keep his focus on God and his faith in God! After Jacob saw God’s Stairway to Heaven, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He would never forget that experience, he would never forget that God is with Him at all times. Through the tough times as well as the good times! This is exactly what we all must remember! Amen

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, in You we are able to find our true treasure! Why do we strive after that which is clay, rather than eternity? Free us from the pursuit of that which glitters, so that we might obtain the treasure of Your kingdom, which is hidden in You. Amen.