

Pentecost 8 Proper 12 Year A  
30, July 2017  
Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church

Another blistering day in Haran, Rachel thought. The sheep sauntered around feeling similarly. The sun was high in the sky as Rachel and Leah sat in their father's pasture, watching the sheep. A dry breeze cooled them down for exactly .43 seconds before the sun realized again its one job is to scorch everything down below. "This will be a good year for our father's flock, a fortune teller told me, someone will bless our flock with their presence" Leah said to her sister.

"That someone is us. We are great shepherds after all...lets head over to water the sheep, there might be some other shepherds to talk to" Rachel whispered. She didn't want Laban, their father to overhear. Not that he paid them any attention. Laban loved his daughters but there were just more important things to him like sheep and how many lambs the sheep had. Sometimes Leah cares too much about sheep too, Rachel thought. Things like having a good flock was not something that concerned her. Not that she didn't like being a shepherd. Laban had his daughters so the same work as his sons. It was mostly just taking care of the sheep but still.

Rachel had her priorities and they didn't involve sheep. Right now her priority was to talk to someone else besides Leah. The sisters loved each other but they could not be more different. One of Rachel's favorite things were going down to the well to talk to other shepherds. Leah avoided it at all costs. Today was no different. Rachel went on her own with the sheep while Leah stayed back.

Rachel made the trek to the well which was pretty uneventful. Near Eastern Farm towns in 2000 BCE tend to be pretty quiet. But down by the well, there seemed to be a bit of a commotion going on. Commotion for Ancient Near Eastern farm towns that is. There seemed to be a foreigner and the other shepherds were gathered all around him. As Rachel walked up their eyes met. He seemed to know her but she had never met him before. Or traveled to where ever he is from because Rachel had never traveled before. Just like that he leapt up thrust the stone top of the well cover off and began watering Rachel's sheep.

Meanwhile back at Laban's Leah sat in a field that had until a few minutes ago been occupied by sheep and her sister Rachel. It was not the ideal place, because of what the sheep left behind, but that is where God met her. Leah fell asleep and in her dream she walked through a pasture much like her father's except it wasn't. This was one in a different place, in a land she had never been to before. In the pasture walked God.

They walked side by side for a time, not saying a word. All of a sudden God stopped looked at her and spoke. The voice reverberated through her whole being yet was not jarring. "I am YOUR God, Leah! Through you I will bless the offspring that springs from you and your sister. Your household will be my household and they will prosper. Leah, you are loved" As Leah pondered what was said to her, all of it slipped away and she slipped back into wakefulness.

Back at the well, Jacob was still showing of for Rachel. "Here, I have watered all your sheep"

"Who are you?" questioned Rachel

"I will need food and a place to stay tonight" replied Jacob, unaware that he was asked a question.

"Who are you?" yelled Rachel well concerned now.

Jacob gave her a half smile, a smile she knew and said, "I am Jacob I am your relative, son of Isaac and Rebecca. Take me to Laban". Jacob leaned in and kissed her.

Rachel didn't know what to say but she knew she had to run back and tell Laban.

7 years later, Leah stood as still as possible as her maids dressed her for the big feast. It was her Sister's wedding and she had to look good, Laban had said. The maids were being awkwardly quiet and she knew why. She had overheard them the other day talking about the wedding. How the younger daughter was getting married before the older. "It isn't our way, Laban should have put a stop to Jacob and his love" They whispered to each other not knowing that Leah had heard it all. Not that she cared though.

Leah loved her sister and the only thing she cared about was that Rachel was happy. And she was. Jacob was insanely in love with her and showed her every chance he got. bringing her wild berries he found or cooking her delicious food. Just little things for 7 years straight until he worked of the dowry for Rachel. He would be good for her and besides it these traditional things didn't matter to her. She still kept in her heart what God had told her.

The men were eating and drinking before the actual wedding and Leah was told to stay in her room and someone would come and get her for the ceremony. Just as she was getting impatient, Laban stumbled into her tent drunk, put a veil on her face and took her to the ceremony. before Leah could realize what was going on he walked her in front of a priest and there stood Jacob. Well barely stood, he was so drunk he had to be held up by two groomsmen. As she looked around for Rachel, the Priest started, blessing the marriage. Leah startled by all that was going on started to cry.

The next day Leah rose early to find Rachel. She slid out of the tent where Jacob was still in a drunken slumber. It did not take long because Rachel was looking for her too.

“Sister, I am so sorry. I did not know. Laban planned”

“I know” Rachel cut her off.

“I would never hurt you like that” Leah trembled and sobbed as she said this.

“I know” sighed Rachel. “I have already talked to Laban. He said Jacob will wake up and ask to be married to me too. He said this was his plan all along. He said it will all work out”

“Will it?” questioned Leah, unsure of anything.

“I don’t know”

“I love you sister. No matter what happens”

“As do I”

They both wept.

This story I wrote is another voice from the Old Testament reading. It isn’t the biblical account but I thought I would give a voice to those in the story that were held without a voice. It is problematic that the two women that this text revolves around do not have a voice. It is even more problematic because their fate is decided by two scheming men.

We all know of Jacob’s schemes, he tricked his brother out of his inheritance and turns around to marry a woman whom by custom he cannot. It seems to me that Jacob has a lot of problem with customs and traditions. Laban is the same way, telling Jacob he can work to marry one of his daughters than when the time comes, marries Jacob to the other one.<sup>1</sup>

Well I am not one to shy away from problematic text but there was another reason I wrote this midrash of sorts. Leah and Rachel have a huge part to play in the Bible and in God’s story. As we heard last week Jacob has a promise from God. A promise of land, offspring and most importantly, that God is going to be with him where ever he goes”. This is astonishing announcement that promises everything Jacob could want for. A place to call home, a legacy, and a God that said, “I am with you”.

That was the kingdom of heaven right there on earth for the patriarchs. This is what they all wanted and were rewarded, eventually. This is what the psalms and wisdom books talk about achieving. And God providing. But, if we just look to the patriarchs,

<sup>1</sup>Brueggemann, W. (. (1982). Genesis: a Bible comm. for teaching and preaching. Atlanta: John Knox Press.

to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we are missing all the people in God's story around them. Some very important ones too. Ones that have the same promise of home, legacy and a God that loves them. Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel have the same promise. From them come the twelve tribes of Israel just as much as the patriarchs. Furthermore, they require home, a legacy and a God that loves them.

Leah and Rachel play such an important role in the formation of Israel that there is so Israel without them even as we read it in the Bible. They have that important of a role in the kingdom of heaven

As we read in the Gospel reading, the kingdom of heaven comes in many forms. The analogies are of extreme value like a pearl or in the mundane like catching fish. And just like the various ways the kingdom can be imagined, our role in the kingdom can vary greatly.

No matter if you encounter God in a grand way like Jacob, or in the mundane. Even if you do not encounter God at all. We have a part to play in the kingdom of heaven. We all make the kingdom of heaven here. When we work for the betterment of the community, when we do a selfless act, when we love the ostracized. We are part of God's story.

God was doing something in the Genesis narrative. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had a role in the God story. But equally so, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel did too. Let us not forget that as we continue with our own God stories how ever they may be turning out.