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Chilson Hills Church
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“Big Love”
Genesis 29:15-28

(<http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>)

I would love to tell you that we can read The Bible and easily relate to everything written in its pages. I would love to tell you that it reflects 21st Century, Protestant values and that we don't need to interpret it or think about it. I wish biblical principles and values were as clear and easy to understand as many preachers say they are.

But I can't.

The fact of the matter is that the last book of the Bible was written over thousands of years by many different writers in an Ancient Palestinian culture which held to different values than the ones we embrace today.

And one of those different cultural values was the fact that women were not perceived as being equal to men. In fact, they were practically viewed as property. They did not enjoy the same rights as men and they relied upon men to speak for them, protect them, provide for them and rescue them.

And there is little condemnation of these values in Scripture. After Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, God laments the fact that relationships have been disordered.¹ God cries out about how women will now be ruled by men. And we see this throughout much of The Bible, including the passage we read for today.

Women were taken and given away and while God doesn't seem to sanction this treatment of women, he doesn't seem to speak against it either. That will come later when God speaks through Paul saying, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”² So, in the mean time women were treated like second-class citizens.

But in spite of God's silence, God still speaks through The Bible. And God still shows up in imperfect situations where women are subjected to unfair treatment. God still shows up and we can see glimpses of divine beauty there.

We see glimpses of this “divine beauty,” in the story of the relationship between Rachel and Jacob. In this story we witness a story that sounds a little bit like some of the popular romance or “chick flicks” I (I mean you) enjoy. In this story we see sacrifice, we see perseverance, we see hard work, we see patience... we see love.

Some time ago, I told you about the inexplicable ability of pigeons to find their way home and how scientists have conducted numerous unsuccessful tests to get to the bottom of this mystery.

Well, there is one possible explanation that seems as good as any: Love.

You see, pigeons mate for life, and if you take the male pigeon out of his cage, take another male and put it into the cage with his girl, and then take the male far away – that male will fly home with amazing speed and accuracy.

It's called “The Widowhood Method” and scientists say it's a powerful method for motivating pigeons.

Now, this may not explain how a pigeon does the amazing things that it does, but it gives us insight as to why it does the amazing things that it does.

We can say the same thing about Jacob; after reading this story from the book of Genesis, we see that Jacob does some pretty extraordinary things. And what seems to drive him to do such extraordinary things? Love.

Let me give you a little back story:

¹ Genesis 3:14-19

(<http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>)

² Galatians 3:28

(<http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>)

Jacob got in trouble with his twin brother and fled from home. Jacob is a scheming, tricky, slippery kind of guy who basically got what he wanted by being sneaky and deceptive. In other words, Jacob got in trouble for being a pretty good con-man. And so he makes the long journey to Haran, where he seeks refuge with a rich uncle named Laban. Jacob comes upon a group of shepherds who are gathered around a well and Jacob strikes up a conversation with them.

They tell him they can't water their flocks just yet because there's a huge stone over the well and they need more shepherds there to move it away from the well.

And then, Rachel comes on to the scene, like those slow-motion scenes you see in the movies. Jacob stares and Rachel throws her scarf back around her shoulders.

And Jacob is so smitten by this beauty, that he does something almost superhuman: he removes the huge stone by himself. And then, with his muscles still bulging and his heart still racing, he waters Laban's flocks by himself and then – without introducing himself - pulls Rachel in close and kisses her on the mouth.... And then he weeps with joy.

Not the typical response to a kiss is it? One thing we know for certain from this passage, Jacob is cocky, Jacob is passionate and Jacob will go overboard in order to get what he wants.

So, Rachel goes back to find her father to tell him about this weird family member that's just kissed her and Laban comes and greets him and invites him to stay with him.

After a month, Laban says that he wants to pay Jacob for his services and so Jacob offers, "I will work for seven years for the hand of your second daughter." Notice he went for Rachel as opposed to Leah, the eldest daughter who had pretty eyes but wasn't as pretty as Rachel.

Now working for seven years was a hefty sum even for a beauty like Rachel (Again, Jacob has a tendency to go overboard). But the years of hard labor seemed like a few days because Jacob's love for Rachel was so strong.

This past week Heather and I went over to Bruce and Peggy Streight's house this past week. And before we had dinner, Bruce took me out to the barn. And for those who know Bruce and Peggy you know what's in "The Barn." Inside "The Barn" are five classic cars in various stages of restoration.

There's the 1954 Hudson Hornet, the 1976 Cadillac Coupe DeVille, the 1965 VW Beetle, the 1960 Austin Healy Bugeye Sprite, and the 1954 Oldsmobile. They're covered in dust, some have their hoods open, but all of them are diamonds... in the rough.

Well, I asked Bruce, which one required the most effort. And he pointed to the Austin Healy, which was in miserable condition when he purchased it for \$100. He said that he had to replace the rusted out floorboards with pieces of metal that he hammered into shape and that the carburetor is a difficult piece of machinery as well.

And I asked him, "So, because you've put the most amount of work into this one, does it also receive most of your affection." And he said, "Probably."

You see, when you work hard for something, you tend to love it more than something that was just handed to you. That goes for houses, boats, cars, gardens and... relationships.

So, Jacob finishes the seven years of hard labor and demands his wife as payment for his services (Again, this isn't a highlight in women's suffrage). But Uncle Laban double crosses him by slipping his pretty-eyed, eldest daughter, Leah into the marriage bed instead of Rachel. And Jacob, the next morning, realizes he's been double-crossed. The trickster has been out tricked.

But, an angry Jacob still wants Rachel so he works another seven years for Rachel's hand and finally wins the one he has adored all along.

I have to admit, it's a challenge to hear God speaking in a story like this. I can't read about the romance without noticing what's wrong with this picture. There's deceit, there's male chauvinism, there's even some misogyny evident in the text. We can't escape what's right there in black and white.

But can we find beauty here? Can we find God at work in all of this imperfection? Yes we can. And we find such beauty in Jacob's persistence and passion.

Several years ago, a friend of mine got married. His family was from India (as in Southeast Asia) and so the sanctuary and reception hall was filled with folks who had been raised or whose parents were from India.

Heather and I sat next to one of groom's cousins who was seated beside his wife and we talked about how they met and how they were married. They told us that their relationship was a semi-arranged marriage, which is becoming more popular with young Indians, especially those living in the United States.

What happens is that the parents act as "matchmakers," so to speak, and then they let the couple work things out. Permission is still requested later on, but ultimately the decision to marry is made by the couple.

The groom's cousin said that semi-arranged marriages work because, he said, "All you need is commitment."

And I thought, "Wow, what a different mentality that is!"

Because here in America, we say, "All you need is love;" which really means all you need is to "feel" as if you're "in love."

But the reality is: it's not that simple. It's not just commitment – because that would result in a passion-less, loveless marriage and it's not just love either (at least the way we often think of love) – because you need commitment to get through the moments you don't feel much love for the other.

This is the problem with Jacob and Leah's relationship. Laban preys on Jacob's extraordinary ability to commit, but there's no love, no passion or intensity to the relationship.

But with Rachel we find both a strong passion and a strong commitment exhibited in the 14 years of working for her.

All you need is love? Yes, that's all you need, but there's a language problem here because what we really need is the kind of love we witness in the story of Rachel and Jacob and then hear later when we read in **1 Corinthians 13** (<http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>) which says this:

"Love is patient (literally "long suffering").... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."³

That's love. And the Jewish people have a word for this kind of love, it's called *hesed*. This *hesed*, if translated literally, means "sticky love," or "steadfast love." It's the kind of things that won't let go when it gets tough, it's the kind of love that moves stones and works for 14 years. It's the kind of love that sets its sight on someone and doesn't give up.

And I look at some of you in this room who have stuck with your partner for 2, 5, 13, 28, 43, 50, even 60 years. And I say, man, you sure exemplify that *hesed*, that sticky kind of love that doesn't give up. I celebrate your commitment through good and bad times. I celebrate your patience and perseverance. We need you as marriage mentors and as guides for all of us who are struggling to live up to the vows we made when we said "I do."

And then I know that there are others in this room today that set out to hold on to another with that steadfast love, and you had your heart broken. Perhaps it was infidelity, abuse, irreconcilable differences or unforgiveable mistakes that kept *hesed* from taking hold.

Let me assure you, that while this kind of love may be hard to find and even harder to practice, I want you to know that it's not too late to start over with someone.

It's not too late to start loving an imperfect spouse by regularly going out of your way for him or her. It's not too late to let a friend or a co-worker know that you care. It's not too late to stand-up for the

³ 1 Corinthians 13:4,7

(<http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>)

wimp, and it's not too late to befriend the lonely ones. It's not too late to hold your precious and sometimes disobedient son or daughter when they've given you nothing but grief.

(A couple of years ago, I came across a short film called, "What Is That?" It's a Greek film that has been viewed numerous times on Youtube. It begins with a sad, scruffy old man sitting next to his son on a bench in front of his house. The son is reading the newspaper, and the father sits quietly in the shade of a large tree.

It's quiet.

And then a sparrow lands nearby and the sad, old man smiles slightly and says, "What is that?" His son looks up and says tersely, "It's a sparrow."

The sparrow flies away and then returns.

"What is that?" the old man says again. And once again the son looks up from his paper to say with some annoyance, "It's a sparrow."

The sparrow bounces here and there and then flits to the tree branches above.

"What is that?" he says again. And this time the son just loses it. "It's a sparrow! How many times do I have to say it! A sparrow! S-P-A-R-R-O-W! Why are you doing this?"

The old man sits silently and then gets up and slowly walks inside.

He returns with a journal and hands it to his son and points to him the place where he should read.

The son reads aloud: "Today, I spent the day with my son who, a few days ago, turned three. A sparrow sat in front of us and he must have asked 21 times, 'What is that?' And every time that he asked the question, I responded by saying, 'A sparrow.' Over and over again, not feeling angry, just affection for my innocent little boy."

The old man smiles and the son sits there chastened. And then he grabs his father, hugs him and kisses him on the temple. And the two are left sitting on the bench holding each other.)

(A couple years ago, I saw a short film called "What Is It?" I thought I would share it with you)

Yes, love is sometimes dramatic and audacious, like Jacob pushing away a human stone or grabbing Rachel and kissing her. But love settles down and finds its roots when we kiss our parents, hug our children, and love our friends when they do things that annoy us or when they make us angry.

The fleeting, fickle, romantic kind of love that so easily fades becomes steadfast love when we decide each day to work hard for the ones we love just like Jacob.

That's God's kind of love. That's "big love."