

## ***Sermon***

***The Kingdom of Heaven is...***

***Pastor Lisa Giacomazza***

***Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church***

***July 30, 2023***

Our scripture from Genesis continues the story of Jacob. Last week, we encountered Jacob after he had stolen the privilege of birthright from his brother Esau, after some trickery on his and his mother Rebekah's part, and God came to Jacob in a dream so he too could know the promise God had made to his ancestors and to him. Today's scripture starts again at the well, the "watering hole" of the day, if you will, and he spots Rachel. And we are to assume based on the scripture that follows, that this was certainly love at first sight though we are not given any specifics. Jacob goes to Rachel's father and finds out that she is not the eldest unmarried daughter so Laban, Rachel's father, tells Jacob he has to work for him for seven years and then he can have his daughter. Now don't know what her elder sister Leah thinks of all of this – we can assume she may have been concerned because other than marriage, there was nothing else for an adult woman at that time. Heck we don't know what Rachel thinks of this arrangement either. Not noted here. In accordance to our scripture, it appears to be a transaction between these two men. The women appear to have little to do with it.

Well the seven years come and go and it's time for Jacob to take his wife Rachel. And when he wakes from his wedding night, he is surprised to find Leah in his wedding bed. So Laban explains to a furious and confused Jacob – look, this is

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my eldest unmarried daughter. She needs to be married first...the trickster is being tricked. But Laban says, hey- work for me for another seven years and you can have them both – we will even throw in their servants. Then the story progresses with more sibling rivalry, infertility and on and on.

God's promises throughout human history are messy. Sibling rivalry, heartbreak, births, child losses, barrenness and more are contained with the narratives. This sounds more like a dime store novel than scripture but it leads to a caution flag. We often look to our faith for guidance on many things, one of which is relationships but as you can see from these early encounters, we humans sure know how to mess things up. If we aren't careful, we can be mislead into a distorted notion of love and fidelity, of fairness and care for all those among us. Jacob was so obsessed with his desire for Rachel that we can assume he did not even "see" Leah on their wedding night. Do we ever become hyperfocused on something we want or that we feel is best, so much so that we run people over in the process of trying to obtain it?

Have you ever had a situation in your life that you feel is such a mess that even almighty God will not be able to fix it? Our scripture from the New Testament in Matthew we find Jesus preaching five parables – two to the crowds, the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast in the bread. The other teachings he saved only for his disciples – the merchant and the pearl, the image of hiddenness, and a fisherman's net. The shift from the mess of creation at the beginning to the teachings of Christ when placed side by side like this are quite dramatic. The image that Jesus paints is one of love, hope, compassion,

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inclusivity, and transformation. And all of this imagery is right here in this world. He doesn't say the Kingdom of Heaven is colors and music and angels and nothing of this world...no, he says when plant something – love, and you nurture it, and you give all the junk that gets in our way, distorts our vision, when you really focus on it – and if it is hidden, you do whatever you need to do to find it, to uncover it. And once you have released all the things that keep from loving yourself, from seeing yourself as something beautiful, miraculous, magical, powerfully good, when you let go of that, you will cast your nets..."Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup>when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad." Jesus doesn't say, threw out the bad fish...Jesus says just simply, threw out the bad.

The Kingdom of Heaven is.... What would you say if I asked you that question? There's no right answer because the kingdom of heaven is here inside of you, it's here inside of me. The mustard seed lives in me...I caste the net.

If we look to humans to tell us how to love each other, we can live like Jacob's world where women are property and have no choice in who they marry, or they are slaves. Deceit, infidelity, abandonment. It's kind of a good thing that Jesus decided to really take this thing called love on because up until then, we really screwed it up.

Love cannot exist externally for us. Love is internal – it's part of our souls, and while it exists internally, like the tree, the bush that grew out of control from that tiny seed, love cannot be contained within us. It spews out everywhere. As

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long as we love ourselves – love who we are as we are. With our flaws, no matter. We are like last week’s message – we are the good crops and the weeds all mixed together – like the net that is caste, good and bad. It is not necessary to be all good to deserve love and to be enough. And like last week, not all weeds are bad. The wheat grows despite the weeds and in fact along with the weeds.

Being a part of the beautiful, messy menagerie that is creation, specifically being human, is in and of itself an act of courage. We get discouraged by the daunting tasks of justice and compassion and all the change so needed in our world...but within all of us, that mustard seed is blooming and at any moment, with enough nurturing will come forth bursting. And the yeast that bubbles beneath the love, will remake hearts and minds. “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid;” The Kingdom of Heaven is...you.

Amen