

“Earning Love and Seeing With God’s Eyes”
A, Pentecost 8; 10:00 am
Genesis 29:15-28; July 30, 2017
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Intro theme at start of worship

Leah’s eyes as a guide to what God sees in us.

I. PROMISES OR CARROTS?

In this week’s installment, we are two generations later. Abraham and Sarah finally bore Isaac in their twilight years, and he was the one Abraham took up the mountain in last week’s episode, ostensibly to sacrifice.

But there, on that mountain, Abraham learned that *this* God, this Yahweh God he’d been getting to know for the past few years, was not *like* those other gods who demanded sacrifices of plant, animal and child.

This God wanted his heart and devotion; a commitment to walk together in relationship. To be *in* covenant.

After Isaac got to come home from the mountaintop hike –a happy turn of events in that family, for sure!–he grew up and discovered Rebekah drawing water at the well one day. Rebekah was a cousin of some sort and deemed by his mother to be a “nice young girl from a good family,” and thus perfect bride potential.

Isaac and Rebekah married and bore twins Jacob and Esau. Their story was one of Hollywood-style drama, as the twins wrestled and competed throughout their lives, eventually even wrestling over the birthright and the “eldest son” prize.

Here, in *today’s* story, we’re in the time after that wrestling, when Jacob has grown and left home to make his way in the world. He goes to Mother Rebekah’s relative, Uncle Laban.

Jacob shows up one night and is invited in to dinner. Then, he just kind of hangs around and does some chores to basically earn dinner every night. After awhile, Laban realizes this isn’t just a friendly family drop-in visit, and Jacob isn’t plan to leave anytime soon. Maybe they should *legitimate* their business arrangement, so there are no hard feelings.

“You shouldn’t work for nothing, my young cousin.” And mixed in that comment is also, “You shouldn’t just keep showing up at the dinner table without a clear understanding between us of how much work you’re going to put in in a day. I noticed you kinda drag in late morning after 3 cups of coffee and that’s starting to grate on the other workers around here.

And Jacob rises to the challenge with what he really wants, young and lovely Rachel. Note that *Jacob* is the one who suggested the 7 years. Doesn’t that seem like an awfully long *time* to work

for a bride's hand?! Especially in *those* days, when people didn't live as long as we do into our Golden Years?

Was Jacob being *generous*?! Or maybe Rachel was very young! And he needed some *time* to earn her. In any case, the dealings between Uncle Laban and young Jacob have an "edge" to them from the get-go. We know from later shenanigans with speckled and spotted sheep that they are both shrewd, even borderline shady businessmen. Wheelers and dealers both.

Here, we're seeing only the beginning: "We can't be having relatives who show up and *mooch* here for nothing. I'll dangle a carrot in front of this guy and see if he bites."

It's odd to our modern sensibilities, this trickery and competition between Jacob and Laban. They're family, after all! Why are they trying to outsmart each other? Why is a daughter's hand something that has to be *earned*—not in the daughter's heart, but in the father's pocketbook?

II. UNEXPECTED TURNS

And then, the very *famous* part of the story occurs. The most talked-about scene in the movie –the bedroom scene! Who says the bible isn't full of some good material? Stuff could be in Hollywood, for sure. (And it is!)

The most notorious carrot of all, the beautiful young

daughter of his boss and relative, brought to Jacob's bed after the wedding feast, after seven *long* years of work to earn this prize.

And.....in the morning, after probably *far* more champagne toasts and other libations than anyone wants to admit.....

Wrong bride.

"Oh, did we forget to mention seven years ago that we *never* marry off the second daughter first? Oops! Sorry—just a little slip of the memory!"

Jacob's *earning* of love has not worked out. For love is not something that can be *earned*—in seven years, or many more.

And so, because he remains devoted to his prize, Miss Rachel, he works *another* seven years. Laban's trickery doesn't win out in the end, and they continue their edgy, uneasy dance of business dealings—with 2 and 4-legged creatures alike—for many years to come.

III. IN HER EYES

The men are the main characters in this story, at least as it is told. But, the women are also the *real* players—sometimes it just takes intentional effort to look behind the wheeling and dealing and bargain-making these particular couple of men get caught up in, to see the genuine human beings whose lives these stories tell.

Leah *appears* to be a pawn in this story. Did you ever ponder how *she* felt throughout this little shenanigan? She's the oldest and supposed to be married off first, but everybody *knows* Jacob is working his sweat off all these years for dear, sweet little Rachel. He's just waiting for her to be old enough even to marry! Hmm.

And *no* one is working for Leah. No one is slaving away in the hot sun, day after day, dreaming of the day he'll take her hand. At least no one that she knows of.

How did *Leah* feel about all this? How did she see it? How did she react to the imbalance, the injustice, and the feeling of being used for trickery? When all was said and done, was she grateful for the trick, for now she had a husband, felt wanted, and could be part of the family?

Did God redeem her life and give her a home and a future, albeit through a meandering less-than-idea path and means than she might have wished for? Was she able to get past the sense of being second-fiddle and the substitute and revel in the Gift, knowing that God always works together for the good, albeit sometimes in mysterious ways?!

How did God see Leah? Different translations describe her eyes as “lovely” or “weak” or “nice.” There was not agreement in the ancient times about whether her eyes and the way she saw the world was a gift or a short-coming.

And, honestly, this might not have mattered to God *one* iota. For God saw behind whatever labels the tribe put on her; whatever comparisons those telling the story seemed

determined to make between this older sister with “those eyes” and the younger, more popular and “quicker to be chosen at the dance” second born.

Can we learn to see like God sees? This God we've been learning about, along with our foremothers and forefathers, who is different from other spirits, who sees on the heart, with eyes of unconditional love and acceptance? Who doesn't even know what categories and comparisons *are*?

IV. THOSE EYES

Those eyes. Were they lovely? Or weak? Or nice? Or a beautiful combination of all of the above? It is said that the “eyes are the window of the soul.”

How often do we truly look into another's eyes and look gently on the soul? Look beyond the surface into what they're thinking and feeling, and how their doing deep down behind the face that the public sees? If we find this uncomfortable to do with humans, I suggest we start with an animal. Look into your dog's eyes. Or a llama. Or a burro or horse!

And like sitting in a different place in the worship service for a change, take on a challenge to see through other's eyes.

This week, find someone or someone(s) to look through the eyes of. To *really* get behind their eyes and look *out* from their perspective. Start with the easy step: choose someone *not* that different from you—maybe a friend or family member whose life experience is similar to yours

but still contains a different perspective.

Then, look farther outside of your circle to someone—even if it's not someone you know personally, and try to learn a little about their perspective. To imagine –for more than just a brief moment—what life looks like through their eyes.

Choose a person or group from a different race, geographic place, political perspective, gender, orientation, religion,

Native American spirituality has a belief that you should never judge someone until you have walked a mile in their moccasins. The God of Abraham & Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel and Leah teaches us not to judge before we look out a mile or many from another's eyes.

Creating, life-breathing and ever speaking, seeing and listening God, give us a glimpse of one another through YOUR eyes. Eyes that look on the heart and see out through lenses of love, learning to understand and new perspectives. Amen.