

Eclipse of God
Genesis 29: 15 ff

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On desert reality next week... Ready to leave, Jacob agrees to only take the spotted sheep from the herd. But Laban isn't about to let Jacob leave with his sheep, so hides them away. Can Jacob find a way to get back the sheep so he can leave with his family? Or is he doomed to serve the Aramean another 7 years?

Then there's Leah...

Oh Jacob, I've given you 6 sons and a daughter...don't fret about Rachel. She's always been jealous of me. I'm the one God has blessed, why don't you stay with me tonight?

The heat is on...

What do we do with all this mess that is part of our holy scripture? This sure doesn't have the feel of a parable. For one thing it goes on too long. Get us out of the desert! Can't we vote someone off?

We began three weeks ago with the love story of Isaac and Rebekah, and continued with Jacob receiving God's blessing. Now we are plopped into the midst of the drama of Jacob's family life. It doesn't feel holy, not at all.

Even God seems to have trouble figuring out how to make this family, God's own family, into something that resembles godliness. The LORD, perhaps trying to make things more just, takes the side of the unloved Leah. The Lord opens Leah's womb and closes Rachel's. Leah seems to understand that God has indeed taken her side and she is not afraid to proclaim it. "Because the LORD had heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also...." And Rachel, she too understands that God has loaded the dice. She finds away around it..."God has judged me, and

has also heard me and has also heard my voice and given me a son" -- the son that came through her maid, Bilhah.

God, even in siding with Leah, isn't able to make this family more just, or more able to reflect his own image. Rachel doesn't have any care for Leah or her happiness. There is no mutual celebration when Reuben and Simeon and Levi are born. Similarly, Leah seems to hold no love for Rachel. There's no scene of comfort or sisterly tenderness when Rachel learns again and again that she is not with child. Instead, it is the love triangle that has taken hold of their lives. In human drama, the desire to love and to be loved overwhelms the senses. In our striving to get what we think we most need, we let go, like Esau did that day he was really hungry, of our inheritance.

Because we humans often don't think that, with God, we have enough.

Take Rachel, for instance. She has Jacob's love. He was willing to work the fields for 7 years that she might become his wife. He had waited for her. He loved her. Still, the first words we hear her speaking to Jacob after she is married are..."Give me children, or I shall die!" This certainly is not a page out of Eggerichs' Love and Respect book.

And yet I suspect some of the words are heard in our kitchen table conversations. We're not a people unfamiliar with hyperbole. We can make a few dishes left in the sink into a nest of vermin, or the clutter around the house into a deadly virus.

That's just the small stuff.

There are days when love doesn't seem like it is enough to overcome our real and unmet needs. Like Rachel, we go to our beloved and demand they make it all better. Problem is, this isn't food Jacob--or anyone--can simply cook up.

Then there is Leah. She has what Rachel so desires, children. She gives birth to one healthy boy after another. For a brief moment, it looks like she will be satisfied, that she will simply praise the LORD! Then Rachel cheats. Rachel's maid has a child for Rachel. So it appears to Leah that Rachel gets the love of Jacob as well as the ability to love children of her own. Leah doesn't feel so happy

anymore. She leaves behind her praise and has her maid sent to Jacob. The children who come out of this dalliance, no longer reflect God at all...a son, Good fortune!" His name is Gad. Another son, "Happy am I! For the women will call me happy." His name is Asher.

Happy am I! Somehow we are not convinced.

It occurs to me that my least happy days are when I stop praising the LORD for all that is good in my life. I get discouraged. I can easily see and obsess about what isn't right. I've noticed that if I spend my day solely trying to fill in the gaps, trying to make things fit into the places I think they should be, righting the wrongs I perceive—if I do this, at day's end, I feel defeated...even if, some type of progress has been made. There has to be in each day a time of praise, a time of thanksgiving, and an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to break through and surprise me. There has to be a moment of recognition that God is here; look what God has done! How different is my work when I look for a way to praise, a way to thank, when I expect a surprise from the Holy Spirit! You who are God's children, children of light, so often you bestow God's good gifts on me, on one another, on those who have the courage to enter into this holy place.

The scripture shows Leah surrounded by children, that which was God's gift to her. All she can see is what isn't hers.

The scripture shows Rachel, loved and cherished by Jacob. All she can think about is what isn't hers.

The scripture shows *me*, I'm too often like them.

God is eclipsed by our human obsessions. The Holy Spirit cannot break through a wall built out of what we wish we had.

A case in point: we look to scripture to find a way to be holy and instead, in today's drama, we see anything but. This is what happens when instead of showing God's light to the world, we stand in the way, pointing to the shadows we create as if they were God's doing. In the Biblical world, God is the one who opens and closes the womb. But that doesn't mean that God was the author of

Rachel's and Leah's feud. They may think it is all about the children or all about winning Jacob's love. In their pursuit of what they don't have, the blessing which is the opportunity to be in relationship with God, that is their inheritance has, for a time, become lost. It is dry in their desert.

Many of you met my pastor from Moreno Valley who preached at my installation service, Rev. Carl Becker. When the relationship broke up with the last boyfriend I had before David came back into my life, I was bereft. I really thought this young man was the one. We had looked at homes. We met at church. I had started to feel settled. That's not easy for me. Then the day came. We broke up and went separate ways. It hurt. I was tired. I wondered if I would ever find the one. So I met with my minister. He was supposed to make it all better, make me feel loved.

Contrary to my expectation, Carl had the courage to say to me at that time what I think needs to be heard by me, by you, today. Be warned, it didn't make sense at the time. It kind of made me angry in fact. I am a hard one to convince.

He said to me all of that stuff you are crying over having lost, it isn't what matters.

Usually, it takes more than a few words to help us let go.

Notice at the center of all the drama in our scripture are two big, maybe the biggest, earthly yearnings--to be loved in a lifelong relationship and to have children. Notice what the pursuit of those two things alone leads to... Is that the island you want to live on?

If those needs do not resonate, there's also Laban and Jacob's feud, both trying to get what they deserve. It might help you to remember Jacob's fear as he approached his home land where Esau lived and flourished. Jacob was deathly afraid that he would get exactly what he deserved. Are we eager to live into that life?

So, then, what matters?

You know the answer from last time I spoke. It isn't far from J.P.'s landing place of last week. What matters is how you see God. What matters is that, like Jacob

did, you take hold of God's blessing—that is a relationship with God. We have an advantage over Rachel and Leah. We don't just have Jacob, we have Jesus to lead us to God.

Jesus said, "Is there any among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then who are evil (given our scripture today it probably doesn't do us good to argue) know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7: 9-11)

Can God be so good as to fill my loneliness? Can God be so big as to provide me a way to leave a legacy, a way to give of my love? Can God be so loving as to give me another way to live other than by an obsession with what I "deserve?"

What matters is you enter into a relationship with God. When you do, it is my experience that, after awhile, you will be able to answer the "can God" questions with an unequivocal yes.

It is okay to ask that God lead you out of your loneliness. It is okay to knock on God's door and say here I am, please show me where I can go to love a child or give birth to something new. It is okay to seek from God another way to live.

It is better than okay. It is what is required of you that you may receive your inheritance.

Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there any among you who, if your child asks for bread will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

A child, whose father he had never known, was asked again and again, who is your father? One day in church, the preacher called the children up for a children's sermon. The boy was there. Something made the preacher ask the

boy, who is your father? Silence descended upon the congregation. The boy stared at his feet. Then the pastor knew..."I know your father. I see the resemblance. You're God's child. You have a great inheritance. Go and claim it."