

Getting Rachael Too  
 Rev. Becca Wieringa  
 June 25, 2017  
 Genesis 29:10-30

I saw a movie recently about a pair of corporate spies who are hired by different companies to, well, spy on each other, so that these companies could outsmart their competitors. Somewhere along the line, the two spies figure out who the other one is, fall in love with each other, and devise an incredible plan—they're going to team up and pull the ultimate heist on their employers.

Through a system of carefully planned rendezvouses and actions, the two put into works the most brilliant mission conceivable. There are a couple of near misses and a few moments when they doubt the other's allegiance to their plan, but in the end, they manage to pull it off—they steal a top-secret formula and they sit down with the buyer who has named the price they like—a Swiss businessman who is as excited about the formula as the two spies who stole it for him...and they wait with giddy anticipation for the cash to be passed across the table to them.

And then in an incredible twist of irony—the buyer's scientists evaluate the validity of the top-secret formula and discover that it is a fake. It is simply a well-known formula for ordinary body lotion. Somehow they have been outsmarted by the very companies they worked so hard to outsmart. As they sit together, bewildered, devastated by the news, their careers over, their wallets empty, amazed that they were duped, they realize one very important lesson:

“Never attempt to out con a con.”

This summer we are going back to our old-testament roots and are learning more about the heroes of our faith. Today is part two of Jacob. Last week we learned about the power of birthright and the futility in running away. This week, we see Jacob in a battle of wits with his uncle Laban—two cons, trying to outsmart each other.

After his amazing encounter with God at Bethel, Jacob continues his journey a changed man. He now realizes that his life has purpose and meaning. He now understands that tricking and deceiving his father and his brother had cost him more than it was worth. So, with great anticipation, he comes to Haran, the land where his mother's family lives.

Jacob stops at the well where the shepherds are watering their flocks, and he learns that this is the very well where his Uncle Laban's sheep are watered. Wonderful! He isn't home, exactly, but he is with family. There is something powerfully good about being with your own people, you know?

Jacob must have felt very relieved that he had reached his destination. But then he met Rachael. It is, for Jacob and Rachael, love at first sight. She is beautiful, beyond words. Jacob wants to be with her. Rachael is one of his uncle's two daughters. Leah, the sister, has kind eyes, but she by no means is the beauty her sister is.

Jacob meets his uncle Laban, realizes there is work to be done, when his uncle tells him to “name your wages.” Jacob responds with “Rachael.” He loves her so much he offers to work for 7 years in exchange for Rachael as his wife.

Jacob didn't have a dowry—normally, a man would bring to the wife's family wealth of some sort, land or livestock, in exchange for the woman's hand. Marriage in those days was a contract—a way of uniting two family units, and generally, the marriage was only acceptable if it profited both families somehow.

But remember, though Jacob had tricked Esau out of his birthright, Jacob left everything behind when he ran away. So he has no dowry to offer the contract. All he has to offer is hard work. But it's not a burden to Jacob. Rachael was no ordinary woman. Rachael was Jacob's heart's desire. He knew any price was worth spending his life with her.

Laban agrees to Jacob's terms, and Jacob works hard for seven years. The bible tells us almost nothing about those 7 years, except that Jacob felt like they were only days. Finally, his time is up. The marriage comes, and Jacob leads his bride away to his version of the honeymoon suit—the marriage tent.

The morning after, however Jacob is in for a shock. Whether it was her veil, or the darkness, or too much celebrating, Jacob doesn't realize until the light of morning that he is married to the wrong sister. Leah, not Rachael, is in the tent with him. Jacob storms off to find his uncle and exclaims, "I worked for 7 years for Rachael, not for Leah. What is it that you have done? You have tricked me! Deceived me! How could you?"

And in another twist of iron, Laban appeals to tradition—to birth right. It is not right, he tells Jacob, for the younger sister to be married before the older one.

And finally Jacob gets it. Here in Haran, the younger will not steal the older's birthright the way it happened in Beersheba. Jacob may have tricked Isaac into the blessing intended for the oldest son. But he would not trick Laban into making the same error in judgment. Tradition would stand. Birthright would be honored. Leah, the oldest, would be wed before her younger sister Rachael.

Suddenly, Jacob's own past has come back to haunt him. Jacob tricked his brother Esau into giving up his birthright. Jacob lied to his father and stole a blessing that did not belong to him. And now, the trickster has been tricked! The liar has been lied to! The sting that Esau and Isaac must have felt at being duped is now Jacob's. The disappointment he felt—he deserved it. Jacob was reaping exactly what he had sown. Lies for lies. Trickery for trickery.

Still, Laban softens the blow slightly. Wait out the week. Finish your first week of marriage with my oldest daughter, and I will give you Rachael too. You will have to work for her...seven more years, but you may marry her.

How could Jacob refuse? He was married to Leah, but in love with Rachael. And so, Jacob agreed to seven more years of hard work, knowing that at least, he would have Rachael by his side.

Jacob is wounded. He got what he wanted, Rachael, but what a price he had to pay. But then, he got what he wanted with Esau too, and remember, it cost him almost more than he could bear then, too. Jacob has a habit of getting his way, just not the way he expects to get it.

But then, maybe that is the bigger lesson here. God made Jacob a promise. He said, I will make you a great nation. Your descendants are going to cover the land like dust. I am never going to leave you. But we see over and over through the scriptures that God rarely does things the way we expect. God shows up, but not always the way we plan or think it will happen.

We all know how Jacob felt that morning, don't we? Jacob gets swept away when he sees something he wants, and he works for it, and is even patient until the day he gets it. And then, the morning after, he wakes up with the wrong sister. Who among us, after wanting something so badly that we would do anything to get it, wakes up one day and realizes, "hey wait a minute, this isn't what I bargained for!"

Let's talk about marriage. How many times after the excitement of the wedding day wears off and the honey moon is over has one awoken and said, "What did I get myself into?"

Men—have you ever thought. Where is the woman I married? That woman never complained about me. We never fought. She always thought that I was wonderful.”

Or women, remember that first time you looked over at your husband sleeping on the couch with chips all over his sweatshirt, snoring away with the TV blaring and the remote still in his hand, and thought, “Seriously??”

In every relationship there is a moment when you realize for the first time that—this other person has flaws. That they aren’t perfect after all.

And it’s not just relationships either. It happens with that job you worked so hard to get; the neighborhood you wanted so badly to move into; the school you just HAD to go to; the team you joined; the church you go to...

At some point, you wake up and think, hey, is this what I signed up for?

It’s not just marriage. So often we pour our hearts and the work of our hands and our sweat and our tears and all of our dreams into something only to discover what we got isn’t what we hoped to get. And when we wake up realizing that our labor was in vain, that the rules were changed, that we ended up where we had no intention of ever being, it is so easy for us, so very human of us, to throw our hands in the air and want to give up. It’s so easy for us to point fingers and blame everyone along the way who duped us and shirk responsibility and wonder how we could have been so wrong.

I’m sure Jacob had those same feelings. But what did Jacob do? He took some advice from Uncle Laban. “Wait out the week, and you’ll get Rachael too.”

In other words, stick around for a little while longer. Wait it out. Don’t give up yet. And in the end you’ll get what you wanted all along.

Jacob felt cheated and tricked by what happened. But in the end, look what happened? He got Rachael, and he found out that Leah wasn’t so bad either.

And in fact, Leah becomes an integral part of God’s plan for Jacob’s life. Without Leah, God’s promise would not have been fulfilled.

Leah, who was unwanted by a father who would go so far as to scheme to get her married off.

Leah, unwanted by a husband who was tricked into marrying her.

Yet Leah, also, is patient and follows the customs of her people. She is a faithful wife. She even, eventually, reconciles with her sister Rachael and they work together to grow and prosper their family.

And God rewards Leah for it. Genesis 30:31 says, When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachael remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben for she said, “It is because the LORD has seen my misery.” In fact, of Joseph’s 12 sons, 10 will be born of Leah. Leah is central to God’s very plan, vital to the fulfillment of God’s promise to Jacob.

But in order to get there, Jacob had to be patient. He had to wait the week out. And in the end, great things happened for Jacob and his family.

We are at an exciting, though fragile, place here at St. Paul’s UMC. We are starting something new, and even though new can be fun and full of possibility, new also means change and change is stressful and scary.

We are beginning to implement community organizing practices that will open our congregation and our leadership up to new ideas and new voices. We will be beginning new ministries that better reflect the needs and the passions of the people in our neighborhood, starting with our five community BBQs this summer.

We are focusing all of our attention on bearing fruit and reaching new people for Christ, and to do that we will be ending some of the ministries we have worked together on and cherished.

Our leadership is changing. This week we said goodbye to church council and in the fall will kick off our new “governance board.”

We are prioritizing vision over structure, relationship over task, action over complacency.

There will even be changes in worship as we stop doing things the way we have always done them, things that are so comfortable to us that we know them by heart, in order to prioritize relationship and conversation even in worship.

And all of this change feels so overwhelming. I know some of you are sitting there feeling like Jacob. You’re looking at the church you put your hearts and your sweat and your tears and your dreams into for so many years only to see it changing and becoming uncomfortably unrecognizable.

But like Jacob learned from Laban, the wait is worth it.

I encourage you today to be patient. Wait out that proverbial week, and you’ll find that embedded in the new will be pieces of the old that you love so much.

Wait out the week, and you’ll find that even though change is difficult, the end result will be renewed spirits and revitalized faith.

Wait out the week, and know that while the growing season is difficult and somewhat painful the fruit will be gloriously worth it.

Wait out the week, and know that even though everything seems new, God who walks through the changes with us is the same God who was here when this church was chartered and is the same God who is with us now and is the same God who will be here when none of us are. The way we live out our mission necessarily changes, but the God who lives in and among us never does.

Wait out the week. Learn to love Leah, and in the end, you just might find you get Rachael, too. Amen.