

Today's message is a sort of continuation of last week's story of Jacob's journey to Paddan Aram. For those of you who would like a quick refresher, Jacob received a blessing from his father who asked him to travel to Paddan Aram, Northwest Mesopotamia or Modern-Day Northern Syria to meet with his grandfather Bethuel. Jacob was to take a wife from among the daughters of his Uncle Laban. Jacob journeyed to Paddan Aram, stopping in a city named Luz. There he had a dream-vision where God spoke to him granting the same blessing that was given to his other grandfather Abraham. We continue the story from where Jacob has left Luz, now renamed Bethuel which translates to House of God.

Jacob encountered some shepherds who needed to roll a stone away from the mouth of a well to allow the sheep to drink and be watered. The stone was very heavy, it usually took several shepherds to move the rock. While Jacob was chatting with the shepherds, one of the daughters of his Uncle Laban came with the sheep. Her name is Rachel, and as we heard in the Genesis passage we read for today, she plays a critical role in the story.

When Jacob laid eyes on her, he was so moved and empowered, he managed to move the stone away from the well all by himself. It is not known if Jacob is particularly gifted with strength, but as we know, humans can sometimes do extraordinary things when in certain circumstances. While the scriptures do not tell us Jacob's motivation to move the stone, it would be reasonable to assume that one of the potential reasons why Jacob attempted to move the stone on his own was to show off his physical skills. Like a form of flirtation, Jacob wanted Rachel to see how strong he was, to impress her with his prowess. Paired with the fact that Jacob knew he was to take on a wife, this is a plausible cause for his feat of strength. Rachel goes to tell her father about Jacob's arrival

When his Uncle heard what Rachel told him, he was thrilled to have a potential son-in-law with such strength and vigor. He embraced and kissed Jacob and brought him to his house where he stayed with him for a month. While Jacob is staying at his Uncle's house, Laban asks him what his wages shall be. This tells us that Jacob is not simply there for a vacation or to just marry one of his daughters. Laban has two daughters. Rachel, whom we already met, is the younger daughter, and Leah, who is the eldest. The scriptures note that Jacob thought Leah's eyes were lovely and that Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Ultimately, Jacob fell in love with Rachel. So he was determined to marry her.

Before we go any further, I would like to provide a little insight into marriages during Jacob's time. I took some notes from Hayyim Schauss' book entitled: *The Lifetime of a Jew throughout the ages of Jewish History*. There are sections for every part of an ancient Jewish person's life from birth to death. In the section about marriage, it provided some interesting and well explained points. Some of you may be a little disturbed about the thought of someone marrying their cousin. It's usually frowned upon in the 21st century. However in the ancient times, marriages were typically made within narrow circles of clans or families. At the time, it was considered undesirable to marry a woman from a foreign clan out of a fear of the introduction of

foreign beliefs and practices which would erode the traditions of a clan. While some of us are open to new ideas and practices, at the time there was a strong belief in the longevity of tradition. The post popular marriages at the time were those of cousins, as it would provide the necessary enclosure of the same clan without having such a direct connection of the family.

The marriage of the son was considered most important as it was seen as the definitive line of a family clan. In a marriage, a price was paid by the father of the groom to the father of the bride. Literally paying for his son to be married off, this was called a mohar. We would know it as a sort of dowry. The Mohar was not always paid in coins or money. Sometimes it was paid by precious jewels or other valuable items. When a family was poor and had no money to offer, there are instances of the father of the bride demanding service or favours from the groom or his family. In Jacob's case, he had no valuables with him. He was determined to marry Rachel, and so he offered to work for his uncle for 7 years. His uncle was pleased to hear the offer, as he wished to marry his daughters off to men within his own clan, and Jacob was the perfect opportunity for this.

Jacob worked for those seven years, and eventually made it to the big day. Jacob was so excited and thrilled that he was barely able to focus. He loved Rachel so much, the ceremony and celebrations felt like a rush of excitement. So much so that when the evening fell, Laban tricked Jacob and gave him his eldest daughter Leah instead. When morning came, Jacob discovered the deceit and demanded to know why his uncle deceived him. Laban explains that it is because of the practices of Paddan Aram that the eldest daughter had to be married first. I could only imagine Jacob's fury towards his uncle, being tricked into marrying the wrong woman. So Laban decides to make a compromise. He asks Jacob to take Leah and then after working for another 7 years, he may also take Rachel.

Imagine the disbelief on Jacob's face when he learns that those 7 years that he worked were for nothing. He was duped into marrying someone else and if he wants to marry the woman he loves, he must work another 7 years. Jacob had a benefit, his love for Rachel was so strong, those 7 years only felt like a few days. So he could be reasoned with and work another 7 years, this time with even more determination because Laban has only one unmarried daughter left and he would not be able to be tricked again. While the scriptures do not specify what happens if the marriage agreement was broken, we do have the Code of Hammurabi. Hammurabi was a great king and lawgiver of ancient Babylon. Genesis 14 verse 1 calls him Amraphel, Kind of Shinar. In that text, it says that if the father of the bride broke the agreement, he is to return double of everything given by the groom to him and to his daughter. This would mean that Laban would have to work for Jacob for 14 years.

Laban knew that he had to follow the custom of his land and he knew that trying to convince Jacob to take Leah was a futile pursuit. So he had no choice but to deceive him. Lucky for Laban, Jacob was so in love with Rachel, he was willing to work another 7 years for him. Can you think of something or someone that enveloped your passion so much you were willing

to do anything to obtain it? Imagine the perfect opportunity or the perfect person to form a relationship with. The question we need to ask ourselves, is do we have that amount of love for God and for one another?

Some of you may be aware of what it is like to work on a farm or on a business. Starting out small and taking years of dedication and hard work to grow crops or to expand your customer base. The book of James tells us how we should be Seeking Gold Diligently. Be patient until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. Sometimes all that hard work doesn't turn out too well. Sometimes the crops don't grow no matter how much work you put in. Sometimes the time and effort you put in doesn't bear good fruit. But the scriptures tell us not to grumble against one another. The Judge is standing at the doors, God sees our sufferings and our patience. We see examples like Jacob, who worked for 14 years of his life, just to marry the woman he loved. He worked for those 14 years because he knew that God would provide for him a family which would spread across the land. He put in the effort of 7 years and he didn't get what he was promised. Instead of complaining and becoming angry and outraged, he put in another 7 years of work. Because he knew God would deliver him, because he had faith that the right woman would be in his life.

Can we not ask to do the same? Can we not work for what is right? God gifted us his son Jesus, we are saved only through him. But Jesus taught us many things by his own example. Jesus calls us to abide in him. We cannot succeed alone. We can work for 14 years just like Jacob did, but without faith, it amounts to nothing. We are called to keep his commandments of love, which requires us to work hard, to seek God, and to show our work to others. To take an active role in the love of Christ. Jacob didn't pay the Mohar with money or with precious jewels. He could have gone off to earn the money to pay off the Mohar with someone who would be willing to pay him more for less time. He could have come up with a way to make the money in half that time. Instead, Jacob worked day in and day out for 14 years. We are called to do the same. To work for our neighbour, to take an active role in our community. For it is among one another where we find Jesus Christ. Jesus says If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

Thanks be to God. Amen