



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
July 30 2023 - Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Canon Paul Walker

Fourteen years, plus a week.
That's how long Jacob waited
to marry his beloved, Rachel.
Jacob, the one who had
deceived, now becomes the
one who is deceived.

The first seven years seemed to him but a few days because of the love that he had for Rachel. But the second seven years - well, they warrant no comment. Sometimes it is not what is said, but it is what is left unsaid that is most revealing.

Jacob finally marries his beloved Rachel at an extraordinary cost to himself. But the back story to these two marriages is worth recalling.

Remember it is on the suggestion of his mother, Rebekah, that Jacob is on the run from the murderous threats of his older brother, Esau, to take refuge with Rebekah's brother, Laban. Returning to his homeland of Haran Jacob is to find himself a wife.

It is broad daylight when Jacob is approaching the region of Haran, and he sees three flocks of sheep and their shepherds gathering around a very large well. There is a large stone covering the well which the shepherds would all roll away together to water the sheep once they are all gathered.

“Where are you from?” Jacob asks.

“We are from Haran,” the shepherds reply.

“Do you know my uncle Laban?”

“Of course we know Laban.”

“Is he well?”

“Yes, in fact, out there is his daughter, Rachel, with his sheep.”

Jacob asks, “Is it not time to water the sheep?”

“Oh no, not until all the sheep are gathered; and then we must roll the stone from the mouth of the well.”

As they were still speaking together, there with a flock of sheep, the beautiful, graceful Rachel, the shepherdess, is bringing in the sheep.

This is the moment. On seeing her, in an attempt to make a good first impression, driven by immense amounts of adrenaline and testosterone, Jacob leaps into action to roll the stone away from the well all by himself, and he waters his mother's brother's sheep. Then the text says, “Jacob kissed Rachel, and he wept aloud.” It's all quite extraordinary. It is as though he is completely overcome.

At this Rachel ran back to her father to tell him that his kinsmen is here, and Laban embraces Jacob and takes him in to their home - thinking of course that because they are all family, he does not need to pay

Jacob for working here. “What shall your wages be?” Laban asks. “I shall serve you seven years for Rachel,” Jacob replies.

Wells, pits, sheep and rolling away large stones are significant in the scriptures. Remember it will be Jacob and Rachel’s son, Joseph - who is only born to them after eleven sons are born by Leah - who is tossed to the bottom of a well by his older brothers and left to die.

It will be the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well who, in broad daylight, will encounter Jesus who asks her for a drink. “I will show you one who gives you the water of life,” Jesus says. “Give me this water, always,” she responds.

It will be Mary who finds herself at a garden tomb weeping when she discovers the great stone rolled away from the pit, and there she encounters the resurrected Jesus.

The scattered sheep all come back to the well, the empty tomb, and there they all weep loudly, and their tears of grief will turn to tears of joy. Like Jacob, on the run from fear of his brother, the disciples’ are locked in the upper room for fear of the crowds. For all of them their tears become the water of life.

You see, the kingdom of heaven is like something very small: a mustard seed, or yeast mixed in with flour. It is like something hidden: a treasure in a field,

or a merchant in search of fine pearls. It is like something invisible: a net thrown into the sea.

The kingdom of heaven is like Jacob first casting his eyes on his beloved, Rachel. When he sees her, he is so captivated he is willing to work fourteen years to marry her. It is like the merchant who sells everything he has to buy the field with the treasure; or the fishermen who leave their nets to follow; or Matthew who leaves his tax booth; or Mary who leaves Nazareth to go to her cousin, to go to Bethlehem, and to flee to Egypt all because she said “yes” to the angel.

There’s something so captivating about a gaze upon the grace and beauty of God, like gazing upon the grace and beauty of the shepherdess, Rachel, that it compels people to leave everything because they realize nothing else really matters. Like Moses encountering the glory of God in the burning bush, or the shepherds encountering the angels, or the Magi encountering the star, or the disciples encountering the resurrected Jesus on the Emmaus Road: what they have encountered changes them. They all realize that what the world has to offer is somehow pale in comparison to gazing upon the grace and beauty of God. So we come, with empty hands to encounter the resurrected Jesus in this sacrament, week after week, and we have a glimpse of the beauty of God, and thereby are changed from glory to glory.