

“The Love He Had For Her”

Genesis 29:15-20

Jim asked his friend Tony whether he had bought his wife anything for Valentine’s Day.

“Yes,” came the answer from Tony, who was a bit of a chauvinist. “I’ve bought her a belt and a bag.”

“That was very kind of you,” Jim noted. “I hope she appreciates the thought.”

“So do I,” Tony replied. “And hopefully the vacuum cleaner will work better now.”

And a quote from Garrison Keillor and A Prairie Home Companion: “Tenderness and stubbornness make for a good marriage, and marriage is the true test of character – to make a good life with your best critic. You have many critics, but your spouse is by far the best informed of all of them.”

When Valentine’s Day falls on a Sunday, the pastor has to talk about love. In this congregation, I hear lots of love stories. While visiting in the hospital recently, a woman told me how she went to a relative’s wedding at the Martin Luther Church on Thanksgiving Day when she was 14 years old. After the wedding service she met a 16 year old boy from the other side of the family that she immediately fell in love with and never dated another.

When he went off to the Pacific during W.W. II, she wrote him a letter every single night and he wrote her back until his return and their marriage after the war. They were blessed with 4 sons and have been in love for almost 75 years. The love he had for her.

I recently officiated at a funeral for a woman who was working in a factory in New

Jersey during W.W. II, where she met an older man who told her about his son who was fighting in the Pacific. They began to write letters to one another but when she attempted to send a picture of herself, the supply ship with the mail was sunk by the Japanese.

But the war would end, he would return to New Jersey, and they were married in 1947. The love he had for her.

A young man gets in a fight with his twin brother over their inheritance. When his brother threatens to kill him, he runs away to the east where he comes upon a well where flocks of sheep are being watered. At the well, he meets a beautiful young woman who he learns is the daughter of his mother's brother.

Jacob is so overwhelmed by Rachel that he not only rolls the stone from the well's mouth to help Rachel water her flock, but he then "kissed Rachel and wept aloud."

"And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father. When Laban heard the news about his sister's son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house."

Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

Then comes our Old Testament reading of love when Laban convinces Jacob to work for him for 7 years for the right to marry his younger daughter, Rachel, for Rachel was "graceful and beautiful" and Jacob had fallen hard for her way back at the well. What's 7 years of labor when you're in love?

In verse 20, “So Jacob served 7 years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.” The love he had for her!

Those of you who have been in our midwinter Monday night and Wednesday morning Bible study, know the rest of the story. Jacob apparently has a little too much to drink on his wedding night and wakes up the next morning to realize the woman next to him is older sister Leah instead of younger sister Rachel.

Not a happy camper, Jacob finds his father-in-law and complains, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?”

Laban explains, “This is not done in our country – giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.”

Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

My future son-in-law, Andy, has not served me one day and yet in June fully expects to marry my Rachel who is also “graceful and beautiful.” As a matter of fact, he bums along on our Florida Christmas vacations and expects me to chauffeur him! What’s wrong with this picture?

So Jacob finds himself married to sisters and immediately Leah is popping out one son after another while Rachel is barren. A barren Rachel is not a happy Rachel.

In chapter 30:1, when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister;

and she said to Jacob, “Give me children or I shall die!”

Jacob became very angry with Rachel and said, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?”

A typical guy response to being criticized by our wife. “It’s not my fault. It’s God’s fault!”

On this Valentine’s Day, Rachel’s relationship to Jacob is one of the few specific references to romantic love in the Old Testament. Jacob had great love for her. But as in any romantic relationship there are always challenges and heartache.

In the book of Genesis, Israel’s patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – all have wives – Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel – who begin the marriage relationship with barrenness. All three women cry out to their husbands and to their God, lamenting their barrenness.

Rachel’s story also highlights the presence of lament in family relationships as she and her sister struggle against each other for their husband and for children. When Rachel cries out to Jacob, when she tries to share her pain with her husband, he essentially says, “Take it up with God! I don’t want to hear it. It’s out of my hands!”

In Genesis 30:22 . . . “God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and named him Joseph.” And of course Joseph will eventually save his parent’s and his family’s lives when he brings them to Egypt for food during a 7 year famine.

So God never gave up on his people. God never abandoned his sons and daughters. God

loved his children even when it seemed all they did was complain and lament. God hears our cries of lament. And God responded by sending his son into our world to be the example of self-sacrificial love, to be the unconditional love, to be the forgiving love with which we are to love one another on this Valentine's Day and always.

So on this Valentine's Day when we are expressing our love for the special people in our lives, it's my job to remind you of the bigger picture which is why we went all the way back to Genesis for the really big picture. God has always and will always love the whole world. He calls us and challenges us to love one another and the whole world with the same kind of sacrificial, joy-filled, unconditional, forgiving, and transformational love that God has given us from the very beginning.

Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lord, let us love one another as you have loved us. Lord, may the love you had for us in sacrificing your son, be the love we have for you and for one another.

Lord, you have set us free in Christ. Now may we use that freedom to join with you in making your kingdom a reality "on earth as it is in heaven."

Then may the peace of God . . .

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