

**“TELLING STORIES”**

**A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF GENESIS (29:15-28) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON JULY 26, 2020----- (THE EIGHTH SUNDAY OF AN ELEVEN WEEK SERMON SERIES THAT WILL TAKE US THROUGH SOME OF THE MAJOR THEMES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS)**

**IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN CURIOUS TO ME WHY OUR HOLY SCRIPTURE IS FILLED WITH SO MANY STORIES.... IT SEEMS TO ME THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A LOT MORE STRAIGHTFORWARD, MUCH LESS MESSY, TO CONDENSE ALL THE TRUTH ABOUT KNOWING GOD INTO A MORE CONCISE LIST OR SOMETHING, DON'T YOU?**

**THE STORIES, THOUGH, MUST BE THERE FOR A REASON, AND I THINK IT'S BECAUSE THERE'S POWER IN A STORY.... THE JEWISH PEOPLE KNOW IT; THEY SPEND MUCH OF THEIR TIME IN WORSHIP RETELLING THESE GREAT STORIES. JESUS KNEW IT, TOO—HIS PRIMARY TEACHING TOOL WAS THE PARABLE.... IT'S MUCH MORE POWERFUL TO TALK ABOUT GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMANITY USING A STORY, BECAUSE RELATIONSHIPS ARE STORIES—THEY ARE NOT SCIENTIFIC FACTS..... AND WE COME TO KNOW GOD BY TELLING THE STORIES OF HOW GOD HAS ACTED IN OUR WORLD,**

**ALL THE WHILE FINDING CURIOUS AND  
POWERFUL INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE  
STORY WE'RE TELLING AND HEARING . . . AND  
OUR VERY OWN LIVES!**

**IT'S CALLED *NARRATIVE THEOLOGY*, AND THE  
BASIC IDEA IS THAT GOD IS IN THE PROCESS OF  
LIVING OUT A STORY OF RELATIONSHIP WITH  
HUMANITY—ONE HUGE, WONDERFUL, MULTI-  
FACETED EPIC SAGA..... AND, ALL ALONG THE  
WAY, OUR LITTLE STORIES—YOURS AND YOURS  
AND MINE AND YOURS—**

**WEAVE THROUGH THE LARGER STORY, LIKE A GRAND SYMPHONY WHOSE THEME MELODY IS PLAYED IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS BY MANY DIFFERENT PLAYERS.**

**THE THING IS, WHEN WE'RE LIVING OUR OWN STORIES SOMETIMES IT'S HARD TO HEAR THE MELODY, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? WHEN WE LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE, TELL THE GRAND STORY, HEAR THE WHOLE SYMPHONY, WELL, WE SUDDENLY FIND TOOLS TO REFLECT ON THE WORK OF GOD IN OUR OWN LITTLE STORIES.**

**TODAY WE CONTINUE OUR JOURNEY WITH PART  
OF THE STORY OF JACOB.....PART OF THE  
NARRATIVE TOUR OF HIS LIFE.....**

**THERE ARE SOME AMAZING STORIES IN OUR  
BIBLES, STORIES CERTAINLY WORTH TELLING  
AND HEARING EVEN IF WE HAVE HEARD THEM  
ALL OF OUR LIVES.**

IF YOU'RE ANYTHING LIKE ME, YOU RUE THE DAY  
YOU OVERHEAR YOURSELF IN CONVERSATION  
WITH YOUR CHILDREN OR GRAND CHILDREN  
INADVERTENTLY SPOUTING PHRASES YOUR  
PARENTS USED TO SAY ALL THE TIME AND YOU  
SWORE—YOU SWORE—YOU WOULD NEVER  
UTTER.....LIKE FOR EXAMPLE:

*“LIFE IS NOT FAIR!”*

IT IS PROBABLY A PHRASE THAT WE HAVE  
PICKED UP FROM OUR PARENTS OR OTHER  
RELATIVES OR FRIENDS AND USED OURSELVES  
IN PARENTING SITUATIONS BECAUSE,

**WHILE THE PHRASE IS DEFINITELY TRUE AND IT CERTAINLY IS WORTH LEARNING, IT IS NOT—AT ALL—BY ANY STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION, COMFORTING.**

**SOMETIMES LIFE THROWS US CURVE BALLS THAT WE HAD NOT BEEN EXPECTING, AND WHEN THAT HAPPENS, WHEW, WE KNOW FOR SURE THAT OUR PARENTS WERE RIGHT.....**

***LIFE IS NOT FAIR AT ALL.***

**OUR STORY FROM HEBREW SCRIPTURE TODAY IS THE STORY OF ONE OF OUR ANCESTORS IN THE FAITH, JACOB, WHO LIVED A SOAP OPERA OF A LIFE FOR SURE.**

**AS YOU PROBABLY WILL RECALL FROM OUR RECENT MESSAGES JACOB WAS THE SECOND SON OF ISAAC AND REBECCA..... HE WAS A TWIN, AND HIS OLDER BROTHER ESAU WAS IN LINE TO RECEIVE ISAAC'S BLESSING AND PERPETUATE THE FAMILY LINE.**

**JACOB WAS RATHER CONNIVING TO SAY THE LEAST..... HE TRICKED ESAU OUT OF HIS STATUS AS THE OLDEST CHILD, BRIBING HIM WITH A BOWL OF SOUP. THEN, AIDED BY THEIR MOTHER REBECCA, JACOB HATCHED AN ELABORATE PLAN TO SNEAK INTO HIS FATHER ISAAC'S TENT AND TRICK HIM INTO BESTOWING THE FAMILY BLESSING ONCE AND FOR ALL, ON HIM.**



**WHAT A TRICKSTER! WHAT DECEIT!.....AFTER HE  
HAD WRONGED HIS BROTHER JACOB HAD TO  
RUN, RUN FOR HIS LIFE.**

**ESAU WAS (UNDERSTANDABLY) INCENSED AND  
DETERMINED TO KILL JACOB, BECAUSE ONCE  
THE BLESSING HAD BEEN METED OUT IT  
COULDN'T BE RECALLED. YOU KNOW EXACTLY  
WHAT ESAU MUST HAVE BEEN LAMENTING,  
DON'T YOU?**

**LIFE IS NOT FAIR.**

**IT'S NOT FAIR AT ALL.**

**SO JACOB RAN FOR HIS LIFE, AND AFTER  
VARIOUS ADVENTURES ENDED UP IN THE  
DESERT LOOKING FOR A DISTANT COUSIN OF  
HIS MOTHER'S..... HOSPITALITY WAS THE ORDER  
OF THE DAY IN THE PUNISHING DESERT, SO  
JACOB KNEW WHEN HE RAN INTO A  
SETTLEMENT OF PEOPLE LIVING NEAR A WELL  
OF FRESH WATER THAT HE WOULD HAVE A HOT  
MEAL AND A SAFE PLACE TO SPEND THE NIGHT.**

**BUT AFTER NIGHT AFTER NIGHT SLEEPING OUT  
UNDER THE STARS, HEAD ON A ROCK,**

**JACOB MUST HAVE BEEN UTTERLY RELIEVED  
WHEN HE DISCOVERED THAT HE'D ACTUALLY  
STUMBLED ON HIS ULTIMATE DESTINATION . . .  
THE FAMILY HE'D BEEN TRAVELING TO FIND.**

**THE PASSAGE WE READ TODAY FROM GENESIS  
29 IS WHAT HAPPENED RIGHT AFTER JACOB  
CAME TO THE WELL AND FOUND HIS FAMILY,  
THE START OF A WHOLE NEW LIFE FOR HIM.....  
HE INQUIRED ABOUT HIS UNCLE LABAN AND  
SUDDENLY, HIS EYES AND THE EYES OF A  
BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN MET ACROSS THE  
WELL . . . AND IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT,  
DESTINY, FOR SURE.**

**HUMANS ARE, EITHER CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY, ENAMORED WITH THE IDEA OF DESTINY. WE ALL CALL IT DIFFERENT THINGS, OF COURSE: GOOD LUCK, GOD’S WILL, KARMA . . . BUT WHATEVER WE CALL IT, IT’S COMFORTING SOMEHOW TO THINK THAT WE’RE DOING THINGS JUST RIGHT, WE’RE ON GOD’S “A LIST”, AND WE’RE GETTING GREAT RESULTS.**

**I KNOW THOUGHTS LIKE THESE GO THROUGH YOUR MINDS, TOO. THIS WAY OF THINKING IS JUST A HUMAN WAY OF TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF OUR LIVES, WHICH ARE OFTEN FILLED WITH SITUATIONS THAT DON’T MAKE SENSE AT ALL.**

**IN THESE MOMENTS ALL OF US LONG FOR SOMETHING TO CLING TO, A SENSE OF COMFORT AND STRUCTURE THAT PROVIDES A PREDICTABLE OUTCOME.**

**DESTINY AT THE WELL ASIDE, THERE'S MORE TO THE STORY WE'RE TELLING TODAY, AS YOU KNOW..... JACOB WAS DETERMINED THAT HE WOULD MARRY THIS BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, LABAN'S DAUGHTER RACHEL..... SO HE SETTLED INTO THE CAMP AND GOT TO WORK, STRIKING A DEAL WITH LABAN THAT HE'D WORK FOR HIM FOR SEVEN YEARS IF LABAN WOULD AGREE TO GIVE HIM RACHEL.**

**THIS SOUNDS OUTRAGEOUS TO US, OF COURSE,  
BUT REMEMBER THAT IN THE SOCIETY AND  
CULTURE OF JACOB AND RACHEL AND LABAN  
WOMEN WERE TRADED LIKE PROPERTY, AND IN  
ORDER TO ACQUIRE A WIFE YOU GENERALLY  
HAD TO PAY A RATHER LARGE DOWRY—YOU  
KNOW, A TRADE OF PROPERTY FOR PROPERTY.  
BUT JACOB WAS ON THE RUN; HE DIDN'T HAVE  
ANYTHING TO HIS NAME. THERE WAS NO WAY  
HE'D BE ABLE TO ACQUIRE A WIFE OTHERWISE,  
SO THINK OF IT AS LABAN DOING JACOB A  
FAVOR.**

**BUT THERE'S MORE. THE HEBREW TEXT TELLS US THAT LABAN HAD TWO DAUGHTERS. IN ADDITION TO RACHEL THERE WAS LEAH, THE ELDEST. SOME TRANSLATIONS OF THE HEBREW TEXT SAYS THAT LEAH'S EYES WERE "LOVELY" AND THAT RACHEL WAS "BEAUTIFUL IN FORM AND ATTRACTIVE."**

**THE HEBREW TEXT OF VERSE SEVENTEEN READS LITERALLY: "AND THE EYES OF LEAH WERE TENDER, AND [I.E., BUT] RACHEL WAS BEAUTIFUL OF STATURE AND BEAUTIFUL OF APPEARANCE."**

**THE MEANING OF THE HEBREW WORD  
TRANSLATED “TENDER” IS UNCERTAIN, AND  
THAT ADJECTIVE IS NOT USED ANYWHERE ELSE  
IN THE HEBREW TEXT TO DESCRIBE SOMEONE’S  
EYES, SO WE’RE NOT EXACTLY SURE WHAT IT  
MEANS. OUR BEST GUESS AS MODERN  
READERS IS THAT THE WORD PROBABLY  
INDICATES SOME KIND OF WEAKNESS. FOR  
EXAMPLE, LEAH’S EYES WERE INFECTED OR  
CROSS-EYED OR VERY SENSITIVE TO THE SUN  
OR DIFFERENT COLORS.**



**AND, EVEN IF THE TEXT MEANT TO SAY HER EYES WERE “LOVELY,” WE CAN CLEARLY SEE A RIVALRY BEING SET UP. RACHEL WAS BEAUTIFUL . . . AND LEAH HAD NICE EYES.**

**IT WOULD BE KIND OF LIKE SAYING: “WELL, HE DOES HAVE A NICE PERSONALITY....”**

**THERE’S NO DOUBT AS WE READ FURTHER THAT LEAH, THOUGH OLDER AND FIRST IN LINE TO GET MARRIED, WAS NOT AS ATTRACTIVE AS RACHEL, AND JACOB HAD NO INTENTION OF MARRYING LEAH—IT WAS RACHEL HE WANTED.**

**AND AS YOU KNOW....THE INTRIGUE IN THE STORY CONTINUES.....**

**AFTER WORKING SEVEN YEARS FOR RACHEL  
JACOB REMINDS LABAN OF HIS PROMISE AND A  
BIG WEDDING PARTY WAS PLANNED.... IN A  
TRADITIONAL MIDDLE EASTERN WEDDING OF  
THAT TIME, ALL WORK WOULD STOP AND THE  
WHOLE COMMUNITY WOULD GATHER TO  
CELEBRATE. THE MEN WOULD BE SEPARATE  
FROM THE WOMEN AND WOULD HAVE ALREADY  
BEEN PARTYING QUITE VIGOROUSLY WELL IN  
ADVANCE----PERHAPS EVEN A WEEK OR MORE --  
--OF THE ACTUAL WEDDING, WHICH WOULD BE  
MARKED NOT WITH A PASTOR PRONOUNCING  
THE COUPLE HUSBAND AND WIFE AND A  
KISSING OF THE BRIDE,**

**BUT WITH ABOUT 15 MINUTES WHERE THE  
COUPLE RETIRES TO A PRIVATE ROOM TO  
QUICKLY CONSUMMATE THE MARRIAGE AND  
CLOSE THE DEAL..... TALK ABOUT PRESSURE!**

**BUT, REMEMBER, IN THAT SOCIETY A WOMAN  
WAS PROPERTY AND HER VALUE WAS IN HER  
ABILITY TO BEAR CHILDREN TO CONTINUE A  
MAN'S LINEAGE, SO WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT  
ROSE PETALS, CANDLES AND ESSENTIAL OILS  
HERE; THIS WAS ALL BUSINESS.**

**WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED. THE BRIDE  
WAS VEILED, AS WAS THE CUSTOM THAT DAY.**

**JACOB MAY WELL HAVE BEEN FULL OF MERRIMENT AND WINE OR PREOCCUPIED OR UNDER PRESSURE OR IN A RUSH TO GET THINGS DONE . . . AT ANY RATE, HE WOKE UP IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE PARTY TO REALIZE HE WAS MARRIED, NOT TO RACHEL, BUT INSTEAD TO LEAH.**

***WHAT A MESS.* JACOB WAS INCENSED, BUT WHAT ABOUT LEAH? SHE'D BEEN USED AS A PAWN IN HER FATHER'S SCHEME AND SHE KNEW JACOB DIDN'T WANT HER..... AND WHAT ABOUT RACHEL? SHE STOOD ON THE SIDELINES, ALSO VEILED, WATCHING ALL OF THIS UNFOLD.**

**IF YOU LISTEN CLOSELY YOU CAN HEAR THAT  
AGELESS HUMAN LAMENT ECHOING OVER THE  
DESERT AND THOUSANDS OF YEARS:**

**“BUT IT’S NOT FAIR!!!!”**

**HAVE YOU EVER WOKEN UP ONE MORNING AND  
FOUND YOURSELF BURDENED WITH . . . OR  
WITHOUT, AS THE CASE MAY BE . . . A SITUATION  
THAT SEEMS TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY  
UNFAIR?**

**YOU DO THE BEST YOU CAN; YOU MAKE GOOD  
DECISIONS; YOU STAY THE COURSE; YOU’RE AS  
DUTIFUL AS YOU CAN POSSIBLY BE;**

**YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE AND TRUSTWORTHY AND**  
**COMMITTED . . . AND, REGARDLESS, YOU FIND**  
**YOURSELF FACING A LIFE SITUATION THAT IS**  
**TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY UNFAIR. YOU DIDN'T**  
**DESERVE IT; YOU DIDN'T WANT IT; YOU DIDN'T**  
**DO ANYTHING TO CAUSE IT . . . AND YET, HERE**  
**YOU ARE..... IT FEELS SNEAKY.... IT FEELS**  
**WRONG..... IT FEELS INSULTING.**

**IF YOU HAVE EVER BEEN IN A SITUATION LIKE**  
**THAT, WELL, THEN YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT**  
**ALMOST EVERY CHARACTER IN THIS STORY**  
**FELT.**

**JUSTIFIED OR NOT, ISAAC, REBECCA, ESAU,  
JACOB, LEAH, RACHEL—EVEN LABAN—FELT AT  
SOME POINT THAT THEY WERE IN A SITUATION  
THEY DID NOT DESERVE TO BE IN; THAT LIFE  
WAS AT THAT MOMENT UTTERLY AND TOTALLY  
NOT FAIR.**

**AND IT SEEMS TO ME THAT IT MAY NOT BE A  
COINCIDENCE AT ALL THAT EVERY SINGLE  
CHARACTER IN THIS STORY IS FACING ONE  
CIRCUMSTANCE OR ANOTHER IN WHICH THEY  
ARE NOT IN CONTROL AND IN WHICH LIFE SEEMS  
SO UNFAIR . . . . WHAT IF THIS TREND IS MORE  
THAN JUST A PART OF AN EPIC STORY?  
WHAT IF IT'S JUST PART OF HUMAN LIVING?**

WHAT DOES SOMEONE LIKE LEAH OR RACHEL,  
JACOB OR ESAU, OR YOU AND ME DO . . . WHAT  
POSSIBLE COMFORT IS THERE, ANYWHERE,  
WHEN IT FEELS LIKE THE RUG JUST GOT PULLED  
OUT FROM UNDER YOU?

WHEN THAT HAPPENS—AND READ THE STORY  
OF JACOB AND KNOW THAT IT WILL—HERE’S  
WHAT THE APOSTLE PAUL TELLS US WE MUST  
REMEMBER: THERE IS NOTHING, NOTHING IN ALL  
THIS WORLD OR ANY OTHER WORLD, THAT  
COULD EVER POSSIBLY KEEP US SEPARATED  
FROM GOD.

NOTHING.



NOT HARDSHIP, OR DISTRESS, OR  
PERSECUTION, OR FAMINE, OR NAKEDNESS, OR  
PERIL, OR SWORD, NOT ONE SITUATION SO  
PAINFUL OR UNFAIR THAT WE EVER, EVER HAVE  
TO WALK THROUGH IT ALONE.

NEVER.

NOT DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES. NOT BAD  
LUCK. NOT POOR CHOICES. NOT A WEDDING  
VEIL OR A WHOLE ENTIRE DESERT. NOT A  
TERRIBLE ACCIDENT. NOT PAIN OR ILLNESS,  
SADNESS OR FEAR....NOT EVEN A GLOBAL  
PANDEMIC --- NOT THESE OR ANY OTHER THING  
THAT WILL EVER HAPPEN TO US WILL EVER,  
EVER RENDER US ALL ALONE.

**THIS IS A STORY WORTH TELLING,  
REMEMBERING AND REMINDING EACH OTHER,  
BECAUSE THERE ARE TIMES WHEN SITUATIONS  
IN OUR LIVES SEEM UTTERLY UNFAIR. HEAR  
THIS PROMISE:**

**NOTHING SHALL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE  
OF GOD.**

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND  
FOR ME.....**

**AMEN.**