

Sermon and Readings 9th Sunday After Pentecost 26th July 2026

Genesis 29.15-28

¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?' ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel; so, he said, 'I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.' ¹⁹ Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.' ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. ²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go into her, for my time is completed.' ²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. ²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went into her. ²⁴ (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) ²⁵ When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?' ²⁶ Laban said, 'This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.' ²⁸ Jacob did so and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

Psalms 105.1-11

- ¹ O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name:
tell among the peoples what things he has done.
- ² Sing to him, O sing praises:
and be telling of all his marvellous works.
- ³ Exult in his holy name:
and let those that seek the Lord be joyful in heart.
- ⁴ Seek the Lord and his strength:
O seek his face continually.
- ⁵ Call to mind what wonders he has done:
his marvellous acts, and the judgements of his mouth.
- ⁶ O seed of Abraham his servant:
O children of Jacob his chosen ones.

- ⁷ For He is the Lord our God:
his judgements are in all the earth.
- ⁸ He has remembered his covenant for ever:
the word that he ordained for a thousand generations.
- ⁹ The covenant that he made with Abraham:
the oath that he swore to Isaac.
- ¹⁰ And he confirmed it to Jacob as a statute:
to Israel as an everlasting covenant.
- ¹¹ Saying, 'I will give the land of Canaan:
to be the portion of your inheritance.'

Romans 8.26-39

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. ³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 13.44-58

⁴⁴ ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. ⁴⁷ ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ ‘Have you understood all this?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’ ⁵² And he said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’ ⁵³ When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place. ⁵⁴ He came to his home town and began to teach the people* in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?’ ⁵⁷ And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honour except in their own country and in their own house.’ ⁵⁸ And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.

Sermon

What do we do when life does not unfold as we hoped? How do we respond when the unexpected surprises us or the unwanted devastates us? Most of us know such moments. For me, it was moving to Australia and watching my life fall apart. For some, it is the end of a relationship. For others, it may be the collapse of physical or mental health. The unexpected may come through job loss or a failed business. In countless ways, no matter how hard we work, how good we are, or what we do, life does not always give us what we want.

Most of us would probably prefer a “what you see is what you get” world. When we ask a question, we want to trust the answer is honest. We expect a fair wage for a day’s work. We hope that doing the right thing will bring the outcome we

expect and deserve. We do not want surprises or hidden agendas. We are drawn to the stability, order, predictability, and control such a world seems to offer because it makes life feel easier and more manageable.

The problem is that life does not always work that way. Jesus tells us the kingdom of heaven does not work that way either. Sometimes real, kingdom life is like a net dragged through the sea, gathering both good and bad. At other times, it is like a field we pass every day: familiar, ordinary, and seemingly unchanged. Yet hidden beneath that ordinary soil is treasure waiting to be found.

Most of us know, from experience, that life does not always give us what we want. Good and bad, dirt and treasure, often lie close together. Things are not always as they appear; what we see is not always what we receive. Sometimes we choose Rachel and wake up with Leah. In those moments, we must decide what our faith means and how, or even whether, we will go on.

Can we trust that more is happening in life than we can see or understand? Can we look at a tiny mustard seed and imagine the great shrub it will become, a tree where birds make their nests? Or is our faith confined to what we see now, what facts and logic can prove, and what fits our hopes and expectations?

These are the questions many in this country face as they search for work, go without healthcare, or struggle to make ends meet. They confront anyone who has believed life was one way, only to discover it was another. That is where Jacob finds himself today.

You may remember that Jacob bought his older brother Esau's birthright for a bowl of stew. Later, with the help of his mother, Rebekah, he deceived his elderly father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing that rightfully belonged to Esau. Enraged by Jacob's deception, Esau planned to kill him. To protect her son, Rebekah sent Jacob to Haran to stay with her brother, Laban, until Esau's anger had passed.

Jacob arrived at Laban's home as a fugitive, carrying both the blessing of God and the consequences of his own deceit. It was there that God would begin to transform the deceiver by allowing him to experience deception for himself.

Jacob journeys to a new land in search of his uncle Laban. At a well he meets Laban's younger daughter, Rachel. She is beautiful and graceful, and Jacob

immediately falls in love with her. He agrees to serve Laban for seven years in exchange for the right to marry Rachel. The years pass quickly because of his love for her, and at last the long-awaited wedding day arrives.

But Laban has other plans.

In that culture, it was considered improper for the younger daughter to marry before the firstborn. Laban is determined that Leah, his eldest daughter, will not be displaced by Rachel in the way Esau had been displaced by Jacob. Laban knows it, Leah knows it, and Jacob is about to learn it.

A great wedding feast is prepared. Under the cover of darkness, Jacob goes into the bridal tent expecting Rachel. Yet the next morning Scripture records one of the Bible's great moments of irony: **"When morning came, there was Leah!"** (Genesis 29:25).

The deceiver has been deceived. The cheater had been cheated!

The man who tricked his blind father now finds himself the victim of another's deception. The one who fled because of his own actions is suddenly trapped by someone else's. Jacob must have wondered how this could fit with God's promises at Bethel—that God would be with him, watch over him, and bring him safely home. A wedding, the morning light, and Leah were not what Jacob had chosen, expected, or desired. It hardly seemed like the fulfilment of God's promises. It looked more like an ancient family drama. (Doesn't this remind you of the modern soap operas on telly?)

Yet Scripture often reminds us that things are not always as they appear.

Who would have imagined that the tangled story of this dysfunctional family—filled with rivalry, deception, disappointment, broken relationships, and unmet expectations—would become part of God's sacred story of redemption? The lives of Jacob and Esau, Isaac and Rebekah, Laban, Leah, and Rachel reveal that God is able to work through human weakness without approving of it.

The same is true for us. Our lives contain stories of family conflict, grief, disappointment, failure, and broken dreams. Some wounds are the result of our own choices; others come through circumstances beyond our control. Those are often the places where we least expect to encounter God.

But what we see is not always the whole story.

Like yeast hidden in three measures of flour, God's grace quietly works within the ordinary and the painful. Though unseen, it is constantly transforming, healing, and bringing new life. His presence is woven into our stories, even when we cannot recognise it.

Sometimes we choose Rachel and awaken to find Leah. Life does not unfold as we planned. Yet even then, the leaven of God's kingdom is at work. His love, His presence, His healing, and His redeeming grace continue to transform us from the inside out. What appears to be disappointment may become the very place where God does His deepest work.

What we see is never all that God is doing.

I'll leave you with this my version of a parable from our Genesis reading.

Hear another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a bridegroom who longed for Rachel but awoke to find Leah. His plans were overturned, yet through the unexpected came the family from whom kings would arise, and through Judah, Leah's son, the Messiah himself. So, it is with the kingdom of heaven: God often accomplishes his greatest purposes through the people and circumstances we would never have chosen. Amen.