

The trickster is tricked. A sermon preached on August 14, 2016, as part of series on Jacob, at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons; GENESIS 29:16-30; 30:25-26; 31:1-7

Just when one thinks the story of Jacob cannot get further entangled with deceit and stealth, Enter Uncle Laban – the first flim flam man recorded in scripture.

I wonder what sort of family life produced siblings so comfortable and open to use deceit and trickery to get their way.

Rebekah (Jacob's mother) we have already seen the lengths to which she is capable of using deceit.

Now, we are introduced to her brother, Laban.

He is a true piece of work in the trickery field – a master trickster

He's the sort of person who shakes your hand and you have to take note to see if your rings are still on your fingers.

The sort of person who puts his arm around you in a friendly greeting and you check to make sure your wallet is still in your pocket.

The story of Jacob in the house of Laban is a self-contained account within Jacob's *story*.

It runs from Genesis 29:1-31:55

I would encourage you, if you have never done so, or it is a long time since you have read this section and read about Jacob's sojourn with Uncle Laban. The selection Joan read moments ago is my choice, to base a sermon upon.

It is an anything but dull and dry story

There is magic and superstitious manipulation as Jacob manipulates the breeding of sheep by using sticks as though the sheep looking at the different coloured sticks will reproduce difference coloured sheep.

There is the magic associated with mandrakes as an aphrodisiac

There is sex and unrequited love – lots of it

Leah, the unloved wife of Jacob, attempts to win the heart of her uncaring husband by bearing him

children – 4 sons – in quick succession (29:31-35)

Each child's name has something to do with Leah's search for Jacob's love.

So there develops a birthing war between Leah and her maid Zilpah and Rachel and her maid Bilhah to determine who can have the most children.

It is a war over the affections of Jacob who marries both sisters.

Even that act is filled with trickery and deceit as in the marriage of eldest daughter, Jacob is essentially set up.

Jacob had worked for Laban for 7 years with the clear understanding from the get go that Jacob

would have permission to marry the more comely of Laban's daughters – Rachel

On Jacob and he thinks Rachel's wedding night, Laban plays a grand switcheroo – now you see her now you don't!

Jacob wakes to find not Rachel sharing his bed, but Leah.

And being the wheeler dealer he is, Laban denies any personal responsibility of trickery.

“Oh, I am sorry Jacob, I thought you clearly understood from the beginning I cannot give Rachel to be married, until her older sister, Leah is married.”

This is a local custom here – oldest daughter marries first – I thought you knew this???? “Didn't you get the memo??

No matter Jacob my boy, enjoy Leah and work for me for another 7 years and you may have your beloved Rachel. Game-Set-Match!!!

In this story of Jacob in the house of Laban there is also conflict and tension. Conflict and tension from the lingering feelings about father Isaac and Brother Esau.

In spite of the dream at Bethel (last week's message) that family tension still exists.

Add to this now, there is the growing conflict between Jacob and uncle Laban

These two warily circle each other looking to their own advantage.

There is the growing tension between Jacob and Laban's family that will prompt in part Jacob to return to his homeland

We will speak more about this as we reflect upon Jacob's meeting with the night wrestler at the Jabbok River – next week's installment of the Jacob story.

There is also the conflict between Jacob and the beloved Leah and the conflict between Jacob and his beloved Rachel over her 'inability' to have a child.

She blames Jacob for this problem. He says in so many words – it's not me my girl who has the problem – look around it must be you (Genesis 30:1-2)

There is tremendous emotion in play here.

Wanting, but seemingly not able to bear a child

There is the sad and high tension conflict between the siblings, Leah and Rachel. Leah – by giving my husband more children, he will love plain old me more than my too flashy sister!

Though never commented upon in the scriptures – I wonder what the maid servants of the 2 sisters – Bilhah and Zilpah thought as they were ordered to make babies with Jacob.

What a train wreck of a family! And this is the family through whom God has chosen to work out his plans and purposes.

This is the Biblical first family.

Out of this portion the Jacob story, there will come the twelve tribes of Israel – all children of Jacob.

That is Biblical fact.

And given the context of the children's' conception and formative years, the possibility of tension between the brothers is very high. See this clearly played out – as the Joseph story begins and develops – next summer's series!!

What though does this story say to us as God's people, *beyond giving us information about the origin of Israel's 12 tribes and providing us with an exciting, if not at times, seamy read?*

I think that among other things, the story is a timeless reminder of St. Paul's counsel to the Galatian church, specifically verses 7, 8 of chapter 6

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. 8 If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

Or to cite the same passage from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*,

7-8 Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God!—

harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.

No one makes a fool of God.

I wonder WHEN Jacob realized on a grand scale that that Uncle Laban had done to him, what he, Jacob, had done to his father Isaac and his brother Esau.

Trickery – birthright, blessing, and now wives – I wonder how Jacob felt when he realized he had been diddled – anger – payback,

I wonder when he realized that a life based largely on trickery and deceit was no life at all.

All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! It is a great description of a life not based upon God's ways.

A life that in no way reflects God's love, care, mercy, grace, forgiveness of us first.

St. Paul's words are not meant as menacing or empty threat – rather they are declaration of fact – *rasty people always get their comeuppance – always*

Now,

since God's plans and purposes operate on a grander scale than the here and now or even a decade from now,

We may not see the consequences of bad behavior in a person's life
 Jacob was fortuitous – he saw the consequences of his bad behavior in his mid to late 20's
 Sometimes, it takes a life-time to see the consequences of bad behavior
 Sometimes the bad behavior is played out in nasty ways in the next generation – the Joseph story being one Biblical example.

We live in a world that does not much emphasize responsibility for actions
 Rights and self seem to trump over so much today.
 Consequences – won't think about them now
 So it is to be expected that the world's reactions to his story or the truth from Galatians are to dismiss so lightly as Bible or preacher talk.

Know this – nasty people always get their comeuppance – always
 God is not bound by our definition of time,
 Further, nasty actions, bad behavior – no matter what its form, always involves and affects the innocent.

Witness Leah – a victim – unloved, unwanted owing to her father Laban's trickery and traceable to Jacob's trickery.

Why would anyone so choose to live such a life?

All he'll have to show for his life is weeds!

When there is an alternative that is so much better.

Question: are there areas of behaviours in our lives that we have planted –

Areas that are not good or up building or serving others and God?

Then it is past time to hike out the weeds and replant with good stuff – such as forgiveness, mercy, patience, grace, lavish generosity and a sense of wonder to name only a few examples
 Then, with God's help, to begin to till the soil (to continue the metaphor)

For who among us wants to look back on a life lived,
 Or be remembered as one, who could have been and done so much honoring God,
 But all our, all their, all his, all her lives have to show are lives **full of weeds.**

I think another reminder from this story in Genesis is *though we may have experiences and know beyond any reasonable doubt that*

...this is my Father's world,

This is no guarantee of a pain, hassle, and struggle free life

Jacob has this incredible dream and hears for himself a wonderful promise of God (28:15)
 But shortly after, he finds himself in the house of Laban – tricked by a trickster!

The Bible is very clear on a central truth.
 Following the Lord,

Endeavoring to put into practice the Lord's teachings.

Trying to make our lives march in step with the life of Jesus,
Does not remove us from this fallen and full of sin world.

Good things do happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people.

The essential difference between people of faith in the Risen Lord

And those unwilling, diffident or hostile to such a faith is that the former – the faithful – are always assured of the presence and nearness of the Lord God.

They know for instance that **The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.**

That may not sound like much comfort in the midst of whatever grim is being faced
Nevertheless –the assurance and promise that God always stands close to us, and closer when we are in trouble remains one of the great comforts, reassurances and hopeful truths of the Christian faith and life.

We do not face the grim or the hard time alone – none of us do

God is with us in an intimate and personal way

That's not some sort of holy triumphalism or super piety.

It is declared promise in scripture.

It is a lived out and knowable truth in the lives of the faithful.

²⁴Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, ²⁵to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.

Amen [Jude 24,25]