

Leah, the unloved wife.

[Genesis 29:14b-35]

TWINS:

For the last 2 ½ years we have been fostering twins: Tadapong & Terapong. I can quite understand parents of twins who say that the first 2 years passed as a blur! In my estimation with our twins, 1+1=5!

We have at least 4 grown people in our church who are twins – how many twins here today?

I have had some interesting chats with Monika Kientz about being a twin – her twin brother didn't start to talk properly until he was 4 because Monika did all the talking, and as twins they had their own personal means of communication! Monika was the dominant twin until she and her brother went away for a summer camp at the ages of 14 – her brother grew considerably during that time, and when they came back from their separate camps the dominance had changed!

Jeff German has an identical twin who is a medical Dr. and there is much less difference between them than between Monika and her brother...or Esau and Jacob, the sons of Isaac and grandsons of Abraham, whose story we find in the book of Genesis. Before Esau and Jacob were born they had wrestling matches in the womb – obviously quite a painful experience, and when Rebekah wearily enquired why this was happening to her, she was told that there were two nations in her womb, and that "the older would serve the younger." When they were born, Jacob came out grasping his older brother Esau's heel – and that is why he was so named, because Jacob means "he grasps the heel" or figuratively "he deceives"...and that is just what happened – Jacob got Esau to give him his birthright in exchange for a pot of stew (Esau later said that Jacob had stolen it), and then he tricks his father into giving him the blessing that belonged to the firstborn...aided by his mother, he dressed himself in Esau's clothes and after strapping goatskins to the back of his neck and his hands, he pretends to be his hairy older brother and tricks his father into giving him the blessing. When Esau finds out what has happened, he's mad and Jacob runs away to find shelter with the family of his uncle Laban.

This is where we take up the story in **GENESIS 29:14b – 35**

About Laban's two daughters we read that Leah had weak eyes...elsewhere this word is translated as "delicate, tender, sensitive, gentle" – so it's probably better to understand this as "*Leah had nice eyes whereas Rachel was altogether beautiful.*"

This sounds just like how my mother described her sister

- her sister's hair was blond and curly; my mother's was dark and straight
- her sister was slender and slim; my mother wasn't
- her sister was bright and could do math; my mother couldn't
- ...and so on.

Jacob was head over heels in love with Rachel and wanted to marry her, but Jacob the trickster had met his match in Laban!

How about this for deception! Jacob works for free for 7 years so that he can have Rachel as his wife – *he loved her so much that the 7 years seem like just a few days!* But on his wedding night, the bride who was taken to Jacob's tent wasn't Rachel but Leah! Just as Jacob had disguised himself as Esau to get his father's blessing, so Leah was veiled and delivered to his tent under the cover of darkness as Rachel!

What a surprise Jacob awaited him in the morning! *"When morning came, there was Leah!"*

When Jacob realized that he had been tricked, he was angry! He storms off to find Laban: *"Why have you deceived me?"*

Just as Isaac had said to Esau about Jacob: "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing."

Genesis 27:35

Just as Esau said about Jacob: "Isn't he rightly named? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing." Genesis 27:36

So now Jacob says to Laban, "Why have you deceived me?"

Realising that he is not the only one skilled in the art of deception, he agrees to give another 7 years of free labour in exchange for taking Rachel as his wife as soon as his bridal week with Leah is completed.

So as Jacob begins his second 7 years of working for Laban, these 3 newlyweds were trapped in a love triangle with very sharp points:

Jacob wanted Rachel

Rachel wanted children

Leah wanted Jacob

...while all the time "Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah" v30

So the characters of this drama are:

Laban – Down through the centuries rabbis and Jewish commentators have found nothing good to say about Laban and his behaviour.

Jacob – Do you feel sorry for him?! He worked for 7 years only to be deceived like that, and to be made a laughing stock. As the tale is told, and retold, and retold – *"...and Laban took the older sister Leah to his tent, and he didn't realize until the morning!!! Ha, ha, ha!"*

Rachel – Or do you feel sorry for Rachel? At what point did Laban do the switch? What did they do with Rachel when Leah was being prepared as the bride?

But our focus tonight is on **Leah** who was used as a pawn of her father's deception. When the humiliated, embarrassed and irate Jacob stormed off to find Laban the next morning you can imagine him shouting,

"I didn't work for 7 years for Leah. I don't love her; I don't want her! I worked for Rachel – and you know that! I want Rachel..." What was that like for Leah?

Examples: When we lived in Birmingham we had Pakistani Muslim neighbours next door. Their oldest son had been engaged to be married to the daughter of his father's best friend when he was 2 and she was 6. The boy was brought up in England while the girl was raised in Pakistan. When it came time to arrange for their eldest son's

marriage they applied for visas which took longer than expected to be granted, when she eventually came over she was 26...and he was 22. 26 was old for girl to get married in that community and she wasn't pretty, and she wasn't the boy's choice of bride (and then they didn't have children for quite a few years) – and this arrangement was the gossip of the neighbourhood for quite some time; chattering about HIM, and chattering about HER! Jacob and Leah.

When we worked in Kohistan, a district of the N.W.F.P. in N. W. Pakistan we heard about some of the ways they used to settle enmities. The area was well known for enmities that would last generations, and for that reason the men would commonly be armed with semi-automatic rifles. In the event of bloodshed, one way of settling the dispute to prevent further loss of life, was to pay money and for the leader of the family who had killed to give his daughter to the leader of the other family – and that sometimes meant a girl as young as 11 being given as a wife to a man in his 50's. What would it feel like to be used like that? Similarly we can think of Leah.

Leah is the unwanted wife
Leah is the used and abused daughter
Leah is the older sister who had always lived in her younger sister's shadow
Leah is the neglected partner
Leah is the instrument of deception
Leah is the one who wasn't chosen
Leah is the wife trapped in a loveless marriage.

Genesis 29:28-30

Jacob finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban for 7 more years.

Up to this point in the story so far recorded in Chapter 29, God has not been mentioned once!

There has been love and romance – *with no mention of God*

There have been agreements made and twice a seven year contract entered into – *with no mention of God.*

A cautionary warning! Don't rush ahead into love and romance, agreements and contracts without seeking the will and the way of God.

Then in v. 31 we read, "**When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved**, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren." And the story of Leah's children becomes a story of her finding God:

SON No. 1	REUBEN = "See, a son!"	<u>LEAH</u> : "The Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."
SON No. 2	SIMEON = "One who hears."	<u>LEAH</u> : "The Lord has heard that I am not loved, and He gave me this one too."
SON No. 3	LEVI = "Attached."	<u>LEAH</u> : "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have born him 3 sons."
SON No. 4	JUDAH = "Praise the LORD"	<u>LEAH</u> : "This time I will praise the LORD."

With the birth of her first son she knew that the LORD saw her.
With the birth of her second son she knew that the LORD heard her.
With the birth of her third son she found that the attachment with Jacob that she longed for she didn't get, but the attachment that she hadn't been looking for, she found! After looking to a weak man for love, by the time she gave birth to her fourth child she had found her attachment – her belonging and sense of identity in God, and so she calls him JUDAH = *PRAISE THE LORD* [the first time that this phrase is recorded in scripture].

Why would it matter to the God of Abraham's nomadic people if one of their number happened to be unloved? Wasn't this the God who created the heavens and the earth, and everything in them? Wasn't this the God who had sent the flood on all mankind because of their wickedness? Wasn't this the God who was watching over his promise to Abraham to grow his family and through them to bring blessing to the world? Weren't there bigger things to be concerned about?

It seems not - because God sees someone is unloved, and intervenes.

Here, as with the story of Hagar, is one of the earliest signs in our scriptural story that God sees and cares for individuals and that love is important both to God and for God's people. It is one of the earliest indicators that God is a God of love, justice and faithfulness who calls his people to live in the same way and to demonstrate his heart.

That belief system which wrote into the genesis of its scripture a simple episode where God responded to an unloved Leah, also brought forward the prophetic voices of

- **Hosea**, who made love the central meaning of God and drew his nation beyond the level of mere survival and into a life of serving and caring;
- **Amos**, who argued that human justice was in reality the worship of God being lived out among people, with special emphasis on the needs of the poor; and
- **Micah** who captured in his writing the core idea of what God requires of God's people - to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

The story of the unwanted, unloved and neglected Leah that reveals the compassion of God's heart is a preview of the life of Jesus whose coming to earth was that we might know God:

- When Jesus **saw** the widow of Nain weeping over the death of her only son, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry"...and raised her son back to life and returned him to his mother.
- When Jesus heard the blind beggar cry out, "Lord, have mercy on me!", he stopped, reached out and healed him.
- When Jesus knew that power had gone out of him to someone in the crowd, he insisted on identifying her so that he could speak healing into her life: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

The death of Jesus on the cross is God's signature and seal of love for this broken world – for broken you and me – who are made in God's image:

- Made to be loved by God
- Made with a need to know that God sees, and that God hears us
- Made for attachment with God
- Made to Praise the LORD
- Made to find strength in Him, whatever the weakness of the people around us.

Leah was unloved by Jacob, but the Lord saw her and loved her.

Leah was unwanted by Jacob, but the LORD heard her and cared about her.

Leah longed for attachment with that weak man Jacob: God offered for her to rest in his strong embrace.

Leah, with all her needs unmet by Jacob, was able to come to the place where she could praise God!

Being unloved, unwanted, neglected and overlooked can cause us to feel shame – we are ashamed of ourselves because we are not good enough, not attractive enough, not worthy enough, because there must be something wrong with us...

God changed that in Leah – and he wants to change that in you! Jesus was despised and rejected by men so that you may be accepted and received by God; Jesus suffered, bearing your shame so that you might know that you are the beloved of God and be unashamed; Jesus “endured the cross, scoring it’s shame” so that you might live a life of praise to God.

As followers of Jesus, we are the inheritors of a long, long tradition in which God sees and responds to the unloved. We also inherit a long tradition in which loving the unloved is a responsibility for those who would walk humbly with God.

At CMCC we have crystalised our church vision statement to be:

“Embracing our world with the heart of God”!

To do as God did for Leah! God’s heart is revealed in this story, and we are called to live the expression of God’s heart! *Where are the Leahs – in our midst; in our workplace; in our moobaan; in the people in our sphere of influence; in the people we have been called to?*

May God envision us, strengthen us and equip us to “Embrace our world with the heart of God” who saw, who heard, who invited Leah to know His strength and who brought her to a place of praise. AMEN.