

Dear Friends,

GENESIS 29: 15-25

Jacob has been staying with Laban for a month. Laban was disappointed not to get any gifts out of him, but he's making the best of it. Jacob is strong, so Laban has set him to work. Laban can see the attraction between Jacob and Rachel growing, he is working out how to use that to his advantage. Jacob's head's a bit fuzzy, he's letting his guard down. Laban is ready to pounce.

Laban says, "Just because we're family you should not serve me for nothing. What shall I give you for your wages?"

Laban knows exactly what Jacob wants; what Jacob really, really wants, that's Rachel. But he has nothing to give for a bride price. So, Laban has attached the bait and dangled the line in front of Jacob. Jacob bites immediately. "I will serve you for seven years for your younger daughter Rachel". Seven years. He's offering a lot. Laban is pleased with the result and quickly pulls in his catch before Jacob can have second thoughts and offer something smaller. Laban agrees to the deal. Jacob serves "seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her".

And what about Leah the older sister? Was she disappointed that there was no husband for her during these seven years? Or was she happy the way she was? Was she like Louisa May Alcott the writer of *Little Women*, who said, "I'd rather be a free spinster and paddle my own canoe"?

The seven years may feel to Jacob like just a few days, but as they come to an end there is a part of him which is feeling the strain. Jacob says to Laban "Give me my wife, for my time is done, and let me come to bed with her". Jacob is feeling sexual frustration. He's beginning to sound like his brother Esau. Remember the occasion when Esau was hungry for food. He saw Jacob cooking and said, "Let me gulp down some of that red, red stuff". Jacob is now behaving in a similar way only he's hungry for Rachel. As Jacob found it easy to trick Esau when Esau was hungry, so Laban will find it easy to trick Jacob while Jacob is hungry. Jacob better have his wits about him.

The arrangements for the wedding are made and the day arrives. There is a procession to and from Rachel's house. The marriage contract is read. A feast is shared with family and neighbours. Throughout, as is usual, the bride is heavily veiled. Laban tends not to be very generous. He prefers to be a taker rather than a giver. The guests therefore are surprised to see that he's spent so much on wine. He makes sure that Jacob drinks enough to make him merry and to dull his senses. At last the moment comes. Laban brings Jacob's veiled bride to him. Jacob is sure that something happened just before that moment. He was distracted and thinks he might have missed something. No matter, what happens next is more important than what just happened. He takes his cloak and wraps it around his bride. They go to bed together and their marriage is consummated.

Jacob wakes in the morning, happier than he has ever been. This is the beginning of the rest of his life. Nothing can cloud the joy of this day. He will now forever be with his true love, Rachel. There is a look of absolute bliss on his face. He turns to Rachel. And the blissful expression disappears. It's not Rachel beside him; it's not Rachel with whom he spent the night; it's not Rachel with whom he consummated a marriage. It's Leah.

God bless you,

Tony