



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. EMILY GRIFFIN, CANON VICAR

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JULY 26, 2026

GENESIS 29:15-28; PSALM 128; ROMANS 8:26-39; MATTHEW 13:31-33, 44-52

FINDING THE PEARL

Genesis 29:15-28 *[Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) 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?" Laban said, "This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.]*

Matthew 13:45-46 *[Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.]*

I won't bury the lead today. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. That is the good news. St. Paul has been building up to this crescendo for months now. Since the beginning of June, we've been hearing bits of Romans every Sunday – mostly uncommented on. I can't speak for my fellow clergy but, given a choice between an argument and a narrative,

I prefer story. Today's no exception. Paul and I will get to the same destination; we'll just take different routes to get there.

Why? There's more room to breathe in story – more space for the messiness of our lives. And what better book to mirror back our messiness than Genesis? As someone who follows the God of my mother and grandmother, I

find the women of Genesis compelling. I live downstream from them. Rarely does God speak to them directly; like us, they struggle with God's hiddenness and silence. If they can find God's love within the limits of their lives, maybe we can too.

When last we visited Genesis together, we were introduced to Rebekah and her how-I-met-Isaac story. Our focus has now shifted to their son Jacob. On the surface, there's nothing redemptive here. We have a man selling off his daughters, another man saddled with a wife he didn't ask for, and two unfortunate sisters having neither voice nor vote in being married off to the same man. Reality TV has nothing on the Old Testament. Where is God in this?

Perhaps we see the unspoken hand of God in the love between Jacob and Rachel. There is a kind of grace to falling in love. As former Archbishop Rowan Williams points out in an old article called "The Body's Grace," we can experience grace when we are desired and chosen by another human being – beyond any question of deserving. When we're loved in our vulnerable bodies with all we see in our unforgiving mirrors, when we discover that we are the cause of

another's deep joy, such love can change us. It can create a capacity to give that we never knew we had. At least that's what happened to me, when I was finally someone's Rachel after a lifetime of feeling like Leah. Over time, this experience of loving and being loved can help us recognize God's love for what it is; we discover that the only thing that lasts in this life is already ours, and it can never be taken away.

It doesn't always work this way, of course. We can love other people without ever making the direct connection to God. We can walk right by mustard seed or yeast and never notice how they have the capacity to shelter or feed us. The treasure hidden in a field can remain hidden. God's kingdom of love doesn't always compel our attention. And yes, we can love someone without the grace of being chosen in return. Just ask Leah.

We get more of her story where today's reading drops off. God shows up again in the text for her. We're told: "When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb." We then hear her story through the names she gives her children. She names her firstborn Reuben, for she says: "Because the Lord has looked on my affliction,

surely now my husband will love me.” She names her second son Simeon, which for her means: “Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son too.” She names her third son Levi, thinking: “Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons.” It’s heartbreaking. Jacob never chooses her first. While he shows respect for her and seeks her counsel in later stories, her love for him is never fully reciprocated. So, where is God in this?

Apparently, Leah found love and grace in her life regardless. She names her fourth son Judah, which means “praise,” for she says: “This time I will praise the LORD.” Maybe she found love in her role as a mother. Or maybe God’s love found her first, and her status as a wife and mother was beside the point. I could say that she finally found the pearl of great price, but that inverts Jesus’ parable in today’s Gospel. The kingdom here is not like the pearl; it’s like the merchant – the one who searches until he finds. Perhaps Leah finally realized that she too was God’s beloved, that she was God’s pearl of great price, and that gave her the grace to let the rest of it go and praise the Lord.

It turns out, God was able to work through the mess of these sisters’ lives. We don’t even need to build up Leah at Rachel’s expense. In the book of Ruth generations later, Leah and Rachel are specifically named and praised, for they (and I quote) “together built up the house of Israel.” Countless generations have found strength in their stories. Naming God in their messy lives helps us to name God in ours. We spend so much time trying to hold onto whatever love we have, lamenting the loves we’ve lost or never had, building ourselves up at each other’s expense, not realizing that God is in our mess too. Where? Where God has always been – loving us, desiring us, choosing us all. Or as St. Paul puts it, nothing – not even us – “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In the week to come, I invite you to consider: Who in your life needs to be shown by your actions that they are God’s beloved? Who might be so battered by bad readings of Scripture that they don’t know the good news is good for them too? How might you let yourself remember that you are also a pearl of great price? In the Name of the One who never stops searching until we are found – Amen.



Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!