

Trinity 8 26 July 2026 Coventry Cathedral

Genesis 29:15-28; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The link between our two readings this morning may not be immediately obvious. In Genesis, we encounter a story that is deeply problematic. It is a story shaped by deception, power, and patriarchy. Women are treated less as people, with their own agency, and more as bargaining chips in arrangements made by men. Leah is given in marriage without her apparent consent. Rachel, whom Jacob loves, becomes the object of a negotiation. We cannot read this passage without acknowledging that it reflects a social system far removed from God's vision of human flourishing and mutual dignity.

In our Gospel reading Jesus offers images of seeds, yeast, treasure, pearls, fishing nets, and the mysterious growth of God's kingdom. When I first looked at these readings, I wondered what on earth they have to say to one another, but finally the penny dropped! What does the Kingdom of God have to say to us when life does not unfold as we hoped?

Jacob certainly doesn't get what he wants. After fleeing from home, after years of uncertainty, he falls in love with Rachel. He agrees to work for seven years to gain the right to marry her. The text famously tells us that

those years seemed only a few days because of his love for her, but then everything goes spectacularly wrong.

Laban deceives him. The wedding night passes and, in the morning, Jacob discovers that he has married Leah instead. The deceiver has himself been deceived. Remember that earlier in Genesis, Jacob tricked his brother Esau out of his birthright and deceived his father, Isaac. Now he experiences what it feels like to be on the receiving end of manipulation and dishonesty. And yet, despite all of this God continues to work. Not because the deception is good – it's terrible, and not because the system is just – it clearly isn't. But because God's purposes are never defeated by human brokenness.

This is an important distinction and it's very good news for us. Sometimes we can be tempted to say, 'everything happens for a reason,' as though every painful event is somehow choreographed by God. But Scripture paints a more nuanced picture. We can make harmful and bad choices. Systems can be unjust and relationships can be distorted. These things are not orchestrated by God, but, and it's a very big BUT, God is constantly at work bringing life out of brokenness and hope out of disappointment. Jacob wanted one thing and life turned up something else. I expect most of us will know what that feels like. We imagined a future shaped by a particular

career or ministry. We prayed, we planned, we worked hard and still things didn't work out the way we had hoped.

Some of our deepest disappointments come from not getting the things that we genuinely hoped for and worked hard for. Perhaps that is why Jesus' parables are so important. The kingdom of God, he says, is like a mustard seed. Just pause and think about that for a moment. The mustard seed is tiny. The kingdom of God is like yeast hidden in flour. It's not immediately visible. Instead it's working quietly beneath the surface. Again and again Jesus teaches that God's activity is often hidden from us. We want dramatic certainty whilst God often gives subtle transformation. We want clear answers whilst God often only provides the next faithful step. We want to know the whole plan whilst God invites us to trust. I have found my own life's journey to be like walking through a dark tunnel with motion sensor lights. The light for the next step only comes on when you keep moving, you have to trust that the lights will come on and keep moving. Jacob arrived intending one future and discovered another and God was already present in Jacob's unexpected reality. The same can be true for us. Many of us can look back on our lives and see moments when what felt like a disappointment was transformed by God. Not because the disappointment itself was good, but because God was faithful within it. We

may be able to look back on the things that at the time felt like failures and see that God's grace was quietly at work, like yeast in dough.

One of the gifts of getting older is having enough life context to discover that God is often doing something larger than we can perceive in the present moment. Jesus' images of the kingdom as treasure hidden in a field or a pearl of great price tell us that it's not always immediately obvious or apparent. The person who finds it recognises something so valuable that everything else becomes secondary but it requires intentional action to seek the hidden treasure. These parables challenge a culture that constantly asks us, what we want, or perhaps more accurately tries to tell us what we want. Jesus presents us with a different question: What is God calling me towards, what is God calling me to seek? What we want and what God is calling us to are not always the same.

Jacob's story reminds us that our want and desires, however sincere, are not the whole story. We often spend enormous energy pursuing what we think will make us happy. Yet discipleship is ultimately not about getting everything we want. It is about becoming the people God created us to be. Sometimes those paths overlap. Sometimes they don't. And when they don't, faith means learning to trust that God has ultimately got our backs.

The treasure of the kingdom is not found through our ability to control our lives. It is found through surrender. The other reading set for this morning is Romans 8: 26 to the end of the chapter. I urge you to read it when you get home because in it Paul talks about how our salvation has been made possible by God surrendering God's Son and how the Spirit works in our weakness, ultimately to ensure that "all things work together for those who love God". All of this of course does not happen at once and so often we can't immediately see God working. Seeds germinate in the dark and yeast works best when the flour bowl is covered.

Which brings me back to Leah. Once Jacob marries Rachel, Leah becomes the overlooked woman and the unwanted wife. She was trapped within decisions made by others, but like Hagar before her and many other biblical women after her, God sees her. Later in Genesis we read that Leah is the mother of Judah, and from Judah comes the royal line of David, and ultimately the lineage through which Jesus is born. I want to emphasise that this does not justify what was done to her but it does remind us that God notices those whom the world overlooks. The kingdom that begins with a tiny seed has room for those whom society considers insignificant. The people pushed to the margins may be closer to the heart of God's purposes than anyone imagines.

This is such good news because there are times in our lives when all of us feel a little like Leah. Unnoticed and undervalued and yet God's gaze rests lovingly upon us. Our worth does not depend on being someone's first choice. Our worth comes from being beloved children of God.

We do not always get what we want. Disappointment is part of a life often more complicated than our plans. And yet as our lives continue to unfold, God is inviting each and every one of us into God's purposes. We are each invited to seek the Kingdom of God. And when the tunnel ahead of us is completely dark, we are invited to trust the God who continued to walk with Jacob, despite some of his terrible choices. The God who saw what happened to Leah and turned her tragedy into the path towards salvation for the world. The God who continually works to grow the Kingdom even when we can't see it.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen