

Today's Jewish Covenant Scripture is an incredible story of patience born of love and profoundly relevant for today.

Laban, which translates "White Guy", had two daughters. He had Leah, which is translated loosely "to labor in vain, to dislike, to be loathe, to make weary". Scripture says she had "weak eyes" and this is cruelly translated by the King James version of the bible as "cow eyes". She had a younger sister who was of a different body type. The Hebrew word for Rachel means to be "entirely perfect in delineation and form", and she was pleasing of visage, or as we would say "easy on the eyes."

Jacob falls in love with Rachel, probably all men did. He proposes to her father and his uncle that as a dowry he will serve seven years for her hand in marriage. The word serve is mentioned three times showing it was hard, repetitive, never ending service. The Hebrew to serve has the same sense as our English to serve, as in military or in worship or in work. Jacob served the full seven years, but that drudgery "seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her".

Now that is a love story! But like any authentic love story it has to become complicated. At the end of the seven years Jacob demands to have his wife so he could sleep with her. Perhaps he was a little more anxious than the text indicates. But after the wedding festivities and on the wedding night Laban substitutes the older sister. It is described in great detail in the Hebrew, Leah enters the tent and Jacob follows, unsuspecting. But in the morning Jacob sees what has happened and bolting out of the tent comes to Laban and says, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve you for Rachel?"

Now at this point many people ask how Jacob could be fooled so easily? According to lot of christian biblical commentators "the liquor is strong and the lighting is bad in the middle east at night." But my favorite statement is from a Jewish commentator who said, dryly "This is always a danger with veiled women". If you thought the debate concerning masks has been lively, consider the wedding veil debate.

So Laban, who is the villain here, acts affronted, saying "It is not our custom to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one". He continues; "Finish your bridal week with Leah and then you can marry Rachel (polygamy was legal then) but you must work for seven more years". Jacob did.

A lot is going on in this passage. First, remember that Jacob stole the inheritance from his brother Esau, the first born. Here, in a bit of Biblical irony, Leah keeps her

inheritance as the first born. Also she bears seven children to Jacob, and Rachel bears two. Jacob is the grandchild of Abraham, who has been promised that his decedents will become a nation. Leah certainly did her part in the history of Israel.

But there is a lesson for today about love's long road. Jacob worked seven years which seemed like a few days because of love, and when asked to do another seven uncomfortable years of servitude, accepted and completed those years. He was driven by love all those years.

In this pandemic we certainly know what it is like to be surprised by how long things can take. We don't know for sure when there will be a vaccine, we don't know how long travel restrictions will be in place. We don't know how long before we can hug our children, kiss our grandchildren or worship together. It is brutally difficult as everything takes longer than we thought, and probably will take even longer still. How do we handle the long road ahead? We need to see the long road as the road of love. The folks who will do the best are the ones like Jacob who because of love do not notice the time. Time does not seem oppressive or cruel. There are researchers who are working day and night and are facing set backs every day like Jacob did. Only making their work "love's long labor" will give them the stamina and strength to carry on. There are doctors and nurses and first responders working long shifts which seem to have no end. How can they do it unless they love their patients? Even essential workers like food, service and transportation workers are taking on long, cruel, and extremely dangerous shifts. Parents who hope schools may fully reopen may have to home school and watch their children longer than they thought they could ever manage. Those seeking social justice have a long, long road ahead of them. The long road of servitude and surprise can only be faced with the patience and dedication that comes from love. Jesus spent three long and trying years with us in public ministry. What kept him going was love. The renowned civil rights leader John Lewis said this, "Ours is not the struggle of one day, one week, or one year. Ours is not the struggle of one judicial appointment or presidential term. Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part." Only love can give us that patience. Jacob's patience secured an inheritance for Israel and guaranteed the survival of Abraham's line. Today with the pandemic what we do now, this year, and the next and the next year after that will reverberate for generations to come. The road to the future is impassable unless it is paved with the patience born of love. That is my prayer for all of us as Trinity Presbyterian Church.