

Making Space for God

Invocation: O God, early in the morning I cry to you. Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you. I cannot do this alone. In me there is darkness, but with you there is light; I am lonely but you do not leave me; I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help; I am restless but with you there is peace. In me there is bitterness but in you there is patience; I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me...

Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945

Looking to the Past- Take some times to settle yourself. Invite the Lord to guide and direct your thoughts for the day. Think back over where you have been this last month. Review your journal. What burdens, emotions, and concerns do you carry? What are you thankful for? When have you experienced the Lord's presence? Journal your thoughts and offer these to the Lord.

Scripture Reading- Jacob and the Daughters of Laban- Genesis

29:1-30

He could sell ice cubes to Eskimos. The sign over his tent should have read, Professor Laban, Doctor of Deception. Jacob the Deceiver was about get a taste of his own medicine in uncle Laban's school of duplicity. Both possessed something the other wanted. Laban had a beautiful daughter, Rachel that Jacob wanted for a wife. Jacob was a tenacious livestock breeder that could make Laban a wealthy man. So they struck a deal with a handshake. Little did Jacob know that Laban's other hand was about to pick his pocket. Little did either one know that the Lord would use their twenty year treacherous struggle to make them both more forthright people.



Jacob, Rachel, and Leah by Theo Tobiasse, Lithograph, 1982, found at elliottgallery.com

The climax of the passage comes in verse 25. "When Jacob woke up in the morning after his wedding night, behold, there was Leah in his bed!" Laban did to Jacob what Jacob had done to Isaac and Esau. Deathbed blessing and wedding night bliss were stained by trickery. At the most intimate level, Jacob was then obligated to live with the consequences of his actions.

Questions for Reflection

1. For people who raised animals for a living, water was the most important natural resource for sustaining their flocks. The water well was the focal point of community life. What is your most important resource and focal point of community life?
2. A heavy stone covered the well probably to protect it from animals that might fall in and contaminate the water. Multiple people were required to move the stone. Notice what Jacob does. What an entrance.
3. It had been 40+ years since anyone from Isaac's family had been to the neighborhood. Imagine the scene and what Jacob and the family might have been feeling. When was the last time you felt similar things?

4. In Genesis 25, Abraham's servant met Rebekah at the well. In Genesis 29, Jacob met Rachel the well. What are the similarities between the two encounters?
5. Compare Jacob's deception of Isaac with Laban's deception of Jacob. Each involved four characters. Who do you identify with in the story and why? When have you felt unloved and unlovely?
6. Deception is a major theme in the story of Jacob. What role does deception play in your life and what is God doing to transform you? Who has helped you the most to be a more forthright person?

Reading for Reflection

In Scripture, the opposite of faith is not doubt but anxiety. To lack faith is not so much to have theoretical doubts about God's existence as it is to be anxious and fearful at a deep level. It is not so much the fear that God doesn't exist, as the fear that God does not notice our existence.

Ronald Rolheiser in Prayer, Our Deepest Longing, page 20

Certain vocations, such as raising children, offer a perfect setting for living a contemplative life. They provide a desert for reflection, a real monastery. The mother who stays home with small children experiences a very real withdrawal from the world. Her existence is certainly monastic. Her tasks and preoccupations remove her from the centers of social life and from the centers of important power. She feels removed. Moreover, her constant contact with young children gives her a privileged opportunity to learn empathy and unselfishness. Perhaps more so than even the monk or the minister of the Gospel, she is forced, almost against her will, to mature. For years, while she is raising small children, her time is not her own, her own needs have to be put in second place, and every time she turns around, some hand is reaching out demanding something. Years of this will mature most anyone.

Ronald Rolheiser in Prayer, Our Deepest Longing, page 47

There is the sense that every man has a Rachel and a Leah within him. It is as though there is a pull within a man towards social conformity and adaptation to outer demands and expectations. Jacob had married Leah because it was the socially expected thing to do. He does not love her, but she was a part of his life, just as outer conformities are a part of life. But there is also the pull from within a man towards the things of the soul. The beautiful feminine image within a man that so draws and attracts him is like a magnet seeking to pull a man into his own inner truth. The two conflict. Outer demands and inner demands are invariably at war. A weaker man, less true to his own feelings, gives up his Rachel side and lives only for Leah and the world of convention. But a man who is true to eros remains faithful to his soul; such a man can come to relate to his inner world.

The Man Who Wrestled With God by John Sanford page 35

The secular world around us is saying in a loud voice, "We can take care of ourselves. We do not need God, the church, or a priest. We are in control. And if we are not, then we have to work harder to get in control. The problem is not lack of faith, but of competence. If you are sick, you need a competent doctor; if you are poor, you need competent politicians; if there is a technical problem, you need competent engineers; if there are wars, you need competent negotiators. God, the church, and the ministers have been used for centuries to fill the gaps of incompetence, but today the gaps are being filled in other ways, and we no longer need spiritual answers to practical questions."

Henri Nouwen in In the Name of Jesus, page 33

Benediction

Restore me to liberty, and enable me to live now that I may answer before you and before men.
Lord, whatever this day may bring, your name be praised. Amen

Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945