Sunday, August 9, 2026

Speaker: Pastor John Vanderwindt
Scripture: Genesis 29:1 to Genesis 30:24
Sermon Title: Our Desires, God's Mercy
Transcribed by: Liza Perry

Every praise is to our God. That's what we just sang. And when we live the way God calls us to live, we can easily give every praise to God. When we decide to do things our own way, it's a little bit tougher because then we end up in situations which are not always good. And that's where we find ourselves today in Genesis.

Genesis 29 is where we're going to read. As we go through this story, I'm actually going to read the first part of the story. And we will read that, and then I'll speak a little bit about that. And then the last part, you'll notice that the reading for today actually goes all the way to ***Genesis 30:24***.

I'm going to read ***Genesis 29:1-30***. And then I'm going to talk about ***Genesis 29:31-Genesis 30:24*** as we go through the sermon, because it's kind of just explained through. And I'm just going to add some thoughts as we go.

So ***Genesis 29*** is a story of Jacob. You may recall that Jacob has fled his homeland because of the situation between him and Esau. And now we get to this place where Jacob is going back to his homeland.

Genesis 29:1-30

Jacob Arrives in Paddan Aram

29 *Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples.* ***2*** *There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large.* ***3*** *When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.*

4 Jacob asked the shepherds, “My brothers, where are you from?” “We’re from Harran,” they
replied. 5 He said to them, “Do you know Laban, Nahor’s grandson?” “Yes, we know him,” they
answered. 6 Then Jacob asked them, “Is he well?” “Yes, he is,” they said, “and here comes his
daughter Rachel with the sheep.”

7 “Look,” he said, “the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the
sheep and take them back to pasture.” 8 “We can’t,” they replied, “until all the flocks are gathered
and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep.”

9 While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a
shepherd. 10 When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban’s sheep, he went
over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle’s sheep. 11
Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. 12 He had told Rachel that he was a
relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.

13 As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister’s son, he hurried to meet him. He
embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these
things. 14 Then Laban said to him, “You are my own flesh and blood.”

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, 15 Laban said to him, “Just because you are
a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.”

16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger
was Rachel. 17 Leah had weak[a] eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. 18 Jacob
was in love with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger
daughter Rachel.”

19 Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.” 20 So
Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because
of his love for her. 21 Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I
want to make love to her.”

22 So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. 23 But when evening
came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. 24 And
Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

25 When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to
me? I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?” 26 Laban replied, “It is not
our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. 27 Finish this
daughter’s bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven
years of work.”

[28] And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. [29] Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. [30] Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray.

Dear Lord, we thank You for Your Word. Lord, we thank You for Your Word, even when it is difficult. Lord, we thank You for Your Word, which reminds us of our love for You and Your love for us. Lord, as we go through this passage, we ask that You will speak and, Lord, that we may hear Your mercy coming through to our hearts as we also prepare for the table that You've set before us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

To put this into perspective, this story of Laban and Jacob and Leah and Rachel, we need to begin with a little bit of a back piece to remind us where Jacob had just come from. Jacob, as we read in ***Genesis 28***, had just come from this amazing encounter with God. He had this vision while he slept in which he saw the angels going up and down the ladder as he had met God, his Savior.

And in fact, it says here in the NIV, *"But Jacob continued on his journey."* The actual translation there is, *"He lifted his feet,"* he walked with a little bit of a lighter step. He had met God, and God had said, *"I will watch over you and I will go with you."* And because of that he could walk a bit easier.

And so he comes to this place where he sees this well, and there he meets Rachel. Now we also need to put a little bit of perspective on this. How old is Jacob at this time? He is 77 years old. What? Hold on. How old is Rachel at this time? 14. 15. To us, we go, *"Whoa, hold on. This is not kosher."* But in that culture, this was the norm.

Now Jacob actually got married later than most people did because you remember, Esau had already been married a few times and Jacob had remained in the home. But here he is, this 77 year old man and he is looking for a wife.

This story should bring back a memory of another story which we read back in ***Genesis 24***, where Abraham's servant also went there to a well. And here we're going to see the difference between doing things our way and seeking God's way to do things.

If you remember this story of Abraham's servant who was sent by Abraham to find a wife for Isaac. He comes to this well. And when he gets to this well, the first thing he does is this. He prays and he says ,*"[12] Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. [13] See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. [14] May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."*

Jacob does things a little differently. He gets there and he sees the people and he asks them about Laban. And then they say, *"Oh yeah, and here's his daughter."* And he's thinking, *"Wow, she's pretty good looking. How about you guys water your sheep and leave? That way I can be alone with Rachel."*

To which they said, *"Oh, we can't do that because we need to wait for all the guys to come here. And that way we can all take part in moving the rock off the top of the mouth of the well."* Which gives you an idea of the fact that this was a large stone that needed to be moved because none of them did it by themselves. They always did it as a group.

And Jacob sees Rachel and what does he do? *"I'm He-Man here. I'll just move this rock by myself. I'll water your flock and I'll put the rock back, right. Let me try to impress her with my strength."* And Rachel obviously was impressed. So she runs home and she talks to her dad.

Later on in the story we get another comparison which you need to look at. And this is where you compare Isaac and the way he prays for Rebekah. In that story, when the servant brought Isaac and Rebekah back, you remember that Isaac was in the field praying, waiting for God's response. And when Rebekah couldn't have children, in ***Genesis 25***, it says that Isaac prayed for his wife and he prayed to the Lord that she would have children.

As we'll see later on in ***Genesis 30***, when Rachel comes to Jacob and says, basically, *"I'm going to die if I don't have kids,"* Jacob's response is not, *"Let's pray about this."* Jacob's response is, *"Who am I? It's God who gives this."*

And so we see a difference here between Jacob and Isaac. And even though in Genesis we have a long story of Jacob, and I think part of that is just to show the lengthy mercy of God and the time that it takes for sanctification to begin to take place. And it reminds us all of how we so often fail.

And Isaac is actually a very short part, but we see through him his life of prayer, as we said that before.

Now we also see in this passage where it talks about Rachel and it says that she was beautiful. I find it interesting when you talk about Sarah and Abraham. Sarah was beautiful. With Isaac and Rebekah, Rebekah was beautiful. And now we get Rachel and she is beautiful.

There's something to be said about what God gives His people. God gives His people beauty. And we should benefit or we should make sure that we understand that we see in our wives the beauty that God has created. In fact, the Song of Solomon is all about the beauty of love in a marriage and the beauty of people.

But the Bible also warns us because Jacob gets caught up in the beauty. The Bible also warns us not to put all of our dependence on that. In ***Proverbs 11:22***, it says, *"[22] Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion. Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion."*

1 Peter 3:3-4 says this. *"[3] Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. [4] Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."*

There is beauty in the eye of the beholder, which should be your spouse. But there is greater beauty in the eye of God when we live our lives for Him, as it says in ***1 Peter 4***, *"... with a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."*

So we've met Rachel.

The next one we meet is Laban. Now, Laban is a character on his own. Laban from the beginning has this concept of, *"How can I take advantage of this situation?"*

And it may sound like it's being very nice of him when he says in ***Genesis 29:15***, *"[15] Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be."* Here he comes to Jacob and he says, *"Jacob, you know you're working for me. Why don't you tell me what your wages should be?"* Laban's not blind. He knows what Jacob's after. He knows that he has come to find a wife.

And so Jacob throws out this extraordinary offer of seven years for a dowry. Seven years for a dowry. The going rate at that time was probably three or four. Laban's like, *"Hey, I'm going to take advantage of this. If this guy's going to work for me for seven years for nothing, well, he'll get my daughter at the end. But until then, it's free labor."* And so he does.

So Jacob gets ready and he says there after he has finished his time, in ***Genesis 29:21***, *"[21] Give me my wife. My time is completed… "*

Jacob has been working all of this time. And it says in the verse before ***(Genesis 29:20)*** that it, *"[20] … seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her."*

So during their typical wedding feast of a week long, lots of wine, lots of other things, parties go on and at the end of this week, there is the giving of the wife to the groom.

You have to realize that the giving of the bride to the groom occurs at nighttime. And Laban, with the consent of Leah, they decide, *"We're going to take advantage of this situation and we're going to make sure that Leah is married."*

Now, we don't know what Rachel was doing at this time. We don't know why Leah agreed to this. You know, maybe she too was impressed by Jacob as a person.

Laban and Leah decide to deceive Jacob. And they do it through two things: clothes, because the bride was always heavily veiled, and through darkness, because it was dark by the time that Leah came to Jacob.

Does this sound familiar?

A couple of chapters ago, we had Jacob who deceived his father Isaac, through the clothes of Esau and the darkness of Isaac's eyes (blindness.) And so in many ways, Jacob is just reaping what he sows.

In one of the commentaries I read, ***Thomas Scott*** quoted ***Robert Harbagh*** and said in this…*"In this the Lord was righteous, but the parties concerned (Laban and Leah) were highly criminal!"*

They were deceitful beyond all measure. But deceit comes often when you have been one who is also deceived.

Job 4:8 says this, *"[8] As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it."* Is Jacob getting what he has sown?

And in ***Galatians 6:7-8*** it says this, *"[7] Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. [8] Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."*

When we think about what we sow every day, what are we sowing for our lives that we too may live as God has invited us to live? This week as we go through the year, we have a scripture passage for each week. And this week's verse comes from ***1 Peter 5:8-9***, which says this, *"[8] Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. [9] Resist him, standing firm in the faith… "*

It is so easy for us to be deceived and also to fall into deception. So now Jacob has a quandary. What does he do now? He knows that marriage was set up by God between one man and one woman. But he's deeply in love with this girl Rachel. So what does he do?

So he comes back to Laban and says, *"Hey, Laban, I don't know why you did this, but you promised me Rachel, and I'm going to make you keep your promise."* And so Laban says, *"Fine, stay this week. At the end of the week, you can marry Rachel for another seven years."* Laban's character is coming through again. It's like, *"I can get another seven years out of this one."* So by the time Jacob is done, he's worked 14 years free labor.

That means he worked from 77 until he was 91 for his wives. And then it goes on in ***Genesis 29:30***, where it says, *"[30] … his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah."*

And in ***Genesis 29:31***, it says,*"[31] When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved… "*

In fact, in the original Hebrew, it says, *"When the Lord saw that Leah was hated."*

This aspect of being hated in this sense is not the way we think of hate, which is why the NIV translates it *"not loved."* But it is this idea that within a marriage, you love your spouse like you love no other.

John Calvin put it this way... *"When Moses asserts that Leah was hated, his meaning is that she was not loved so much as she ought to have been."*

Jacob did not treat her as his wife.

In ***Luke 14:26*** to talk about this word hated, it says, *"[26] "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple."*

Which reminds us that our greatest love needs to be for God. Which doesn't mean we don't treat other people well. It doesn't mean that we should not love other people. But as Jesus said, *"You love God most of all and your neighbor as yourself."*

And then we have the listing of the children in these next verses. And in many ways, it's playing a name game, because what happened here was that Leah saw that Rachel was loved and she was not. And so the only way to get back at Rachel would be through her children.

And it begins when it says in ***Genesis 29:31***, *"[31] When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless."* God remembered Leah. He saw that Leah was not being loved as she ought.

And so Leah gains a son. It says in ***Genesis 29:32***, *"[32] Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."*

Now. Reuben means: *"see a son."* And for a woman at that time, to have a son was the ultimate prize, because that included the ancestry and it would create descendants for her husband.

And in ***Genesis 29:33***, it says, *"[33] She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon."*

And Simeon is very similar to the Hebrew word which means: *"the one who hears."* Similar to what Hagar had in the desert, where she knew that God heard her.

Now here's the player to the name game which is being played. Leah says, *"This is my son because God has heard me. He hasn't heard you, Rachel. God has heard me."*

And then in ***Genesis 29:34***,*"[34] Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi."*

And Levi means to be: *"attached or to be joined"* together. This aspect of how God will now make it so that Jacob will now become hers. But Levi's name actually later on becomes an important part of God's people, as from the tribe of Levi come the priests, the ones who attach and join us to God. And so this name is very prophetic as to what will happen.

And then in ***Genesis 29:35***, *"[35] She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children."* And Judah simply means: *"praise."* Thinking that, *"After four sons, I will be loved as I ought."*

Then here comes the battle in ***Genesis 30:1***, "1 *When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"* And Jacob's response is, *"[2] Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"*

Finally, Jacob acknowledges that it is God who is the giver of all life. And we need to remember that within our own situation that it is God who is the giver of life.

And so then she says, *"[3] Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her."* She decides to give Jacob her servant.

And in that piece, Jacob then takes Bilhah. The idea is this same concept that is in that community of, *"I will give you my servant as a surrogate mother, but the child belongs to me."* The child would belong to Rachel, and Rachel would claim this child as a son.

We've heard this story before, too, with Sarah and Hagar, and I'm sure Jacob had heard this story. And Jacob found out from this story that it did not go well. And yet Jacob just went on. Obviously he didn't learn from his grandfather.

And how often don't we do things that have been done in the past? And we go, *"I know this didn't work out in the past, but maybe this time it will be okay."*

And Jacob says, okay. And Bilhah has a child. It says in ***Genesis 30:5***, *"[5] and she became pregnant and bore him a son. [6] Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan."*

And Dan simply means: *"he has vindicated."* Rachel is now saying, *"Ha, you've got children. Now I've got a son as well."*

And Bilhah has another one, Naphtali, which we read in where it says in ***Genesis 30:8***, *"[8] "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali."* Which means: *"my struggle."* Or some say it's: *"my wrestling with God."*

So this war is going on between Rachel and Leah. And Leah sees this and she says, *"Hold on, you're not going to outdo me here."*

I'm going to give my servant Zilpah to you. And so Jacob goes with Zilpah, and Zilpah bears Jacob a son. In ***Genesis 30:10***, it says, *"[11] Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad."* She's basically saying, *"I'm keeping track of numbers. I'm now up five to two."*

And then in ***Genesis 30:12***, it says, *"[12] Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. [13] Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher."* Asher simply means: *"happy."* And now she's up 6 to 2.

And Rachel's in this place where she's going, *"This is not good. I need more children."* And so the next little part of the story is of when Reuben was out in the field and he found some mandrakes. And mandrakes were seen as this sign of fertility.

So Rachel comes to Leah and says, *"Sell me your mandrakes so that I may have children."* And Leah says, *"Okay, but here's the deal. Tonight I get Jacob, and you can have the mandrakes."* And so that night, Jacob goes with Leah.

And in ***Genesis 30:17***, it says, *"[17] God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. [18] Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband." So she named him Issachar."* And Issachar simply means: *"reward."*

Leah, in her own thinking, thinks, *"God's just blessing me because I'm doing things right. Or am I?"*

And then she has another one. And she says she presented him with a gift. In ***Genesis 30:20,*** *"[20] … This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun."* Zebulun is this aspect of: *"honor."*

And now eight boys are accredited to Leah and her maidservant, and two accredited to Rachel. There is also a daughter born. And it says that sometime later in ***Genesis 30:21***, *"[21] Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah."* Dinah is actually similar to the word Dan. And so Dinah also means: *"judgment."* It is this symbolic way of Leah saying, *"God's judging you, Rachel."*

Then we get to ***Genesis 30:22***. *"[22] Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive."*

God remembered Rachel. He listened to her. At some point, Rachel must have understood that it begins with prayer and pleading to the Lord. After everything had failed, she finally went back to God.

And this word *"remembered"* is a word of covenant. You may remember that when Noah was in the ark, it says, *"God remembered him."* God remembering you is not this aspect of, *"Oh, I almost forgot about you there."* It is God showing you that He is present. It is more of a reminder for you that God is there than for God. God remembers you all the time.

In fact, ***Psalm 73*** is a beautiful psalm, and I encourage you to read it sometime. But it begins with, *"[1] Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."* And it talks about God remembering us. And it ends with these words, *"[28] But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds."*

This aspect of being remembered makes a difference.

Martin Luther says, *“Does God have no other occupation left than to have regard for the lowliness of the household?”*

Part of God's dwelling and part of God's doing is to remember. The lowly Mary says it this way in her song in ***Luke 1:46b-48***, *“[46] My soul glorifies the Lord [47] and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, [48] for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed.”*

Rachel has a child, and she names that child Joseph, which simply means: *“may he add.”* Rachel's plea continues, even though her disgrace has been taken away. She now has a son of her own.

She pleads that she may have more, and little does she know that the words which she spoke at the beginning of Genesis 30, which says, *“Give me children, or I’ll die!”* that later on we'll see that it is in the birth of her second child in which she actually dies.

And here we see our desires taking over Jacob as Joseph grows up. Jacob favors Joseph way among all of his other kids. And Esau is favored by Isaac. But God chooses in His mercy.

There is nothing that we can do to earn favoritism with God. God simply loves us equally as He ought to. And in this we also see that God's mercy is extended to Leah.

Even though much of Genesis is about Joseph, God's mercy gets extended to Leah because through the line of Leah, we have the Levites who become the line of the priests. And then ultimately it is through Leah that we have the line of Judah.

And it is Judah which leads to the Messiah. And when we think of God's mercy for all of us, God's mercy comes through that line of Judah. That line in which Leah said, *“I'm going to call him Judah because I am going to praise the Lord.”*

The Lord’s Supper

And it is out of that praise that God says, “I will send my son, and my son will die for you.” Jesus, when He was with His disciples, said, *“Do this in remembrance of me.”* That remembrance comes not because God has forgotten, but the remembrance comes because God remembers us.

And in God remembering us, He sent His Son for us that we may have life. And so Jesus took the bread. And Yeshua means Savior. But Jesus took the bread and He broke it. And with this bread He said, *“This is my body. This is the body which has been broken for you so that you may have life and you may receive God's mercy.”*

And then he took the cup. And with the cup, as with the bread, He gave thanks as He said, *"This is my blood which I have shed for you. This is the way I extend mercy to you. Even though it may take you many times to learn the lessons that I've taught you, I extend my mercy to you and invite you to the table."*

And so I invite the elders who are serving this morning to come forward. And as you receive the bread, I invite you simply to hold it and to think about the mercy of God that you have received in your life. And remember, mercy is not being given what you deserve. We all deserve death. But yet it is the mercy of God that gives us life. Because God is faithful and he keeps the promises which He has extended to us.

[Bread is handed out.]

You lift me up when I fall down, and I cry out again and again. And again. And each time I cry out, God extends His mercy to me. But we need to keep crying out. We need to keep realizing that we need Him *every day.*

And Jesus says, "This bread is a reminder for you to cry out and to know that I am there, that I will lift you up." So take it. And as you eat it, remember that Christ says, *"I forgive you of all your sins."*

[Bread is eaten.]

As you take the juice, remember how Christ's blood flowed down the cross as a way to pay for your sins, as a way to extend mercy to you. That He is the Lamb of God.

[Juice is passed out.]

Amazing love. That the King of the universe would allow Himself to be beaten and shed His blood that we may reign with the King and that we may be forgiven from all our sins.

As you drink this, as you feel it go down your throat, know that Christ's blood on the cross has washed you clean from the inside out.

[Congregation drinks juice.]

One of Leah's children was Levi. And Levi was the one who Leah thought would cause her husband to join her. But God used Levi as a way for God to connect with the people and the people to be attached to God.

And many years later, Aaron and the Levite priests were asked, *"How do you want me, Lord, to let people know that they are yours?"* And the Lord told Moses, *"Tell Aaron that this is how you are to bless them."*

And so we invite you to stand, if you're able, to extend your hands and to receive this blessing from God. God has given His son that we have partaken in the food and the drink, and now God blesses us.

Numbers 6:24-26, *“**24** “The Lord bless you and keep you; **25** the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; **26** the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”* Through the redeeming death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.