Hi,

Can you believe it. The 100th of these emails that began on March 16. Here are today’s updates:

* My 3pm Monday Matthew class and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet this week on [my new Facebook Page: “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC.”](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour)
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

We’ll continue the story of the Patriarchs for the next few days. Who doesn’t like a good story?

***Genesis 29:15-28 (The Message)***

[Jacob has fled north to escape Esau’s wrath. He approaches a well and strikes up a conversation. Do they know Laban, Jacob’s uncle? They do know Laban and point out that his daughter, Rachel, is also coming to the well.]

**While Jacob was in conversation with them, Rachel came up with her father’s sheep. She was the shepherd. The moment Jacob spotted Rachel, daughter of Laban his mother’s brother, saw her arriving with his uncle Laban’s sheep, he went and single-handedly rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of his uncle Laban. Then he kissed Rachel and broke into tears. He told Rachel that he was related to her father, that he was Rebekah’s son. She ran and told her father. When Laban heard the news—Jacob, his sister’s son!—he ran out to meet him, embraced and kissed him and brought him home. Jacob told Laban the story of everything that had happened.**

**Laban said, “You’re family! My flesh and blood!”**

**When Jacob had been with him for a month, Laban said, “Just because you’re my nephew, you shouldn’t work for me for nothing. Tell me what you want to be paid. What’s a fair wage?”**

**Now Laban had two daughters; Leah was the older and Rachel the younger. Leah had nice eyes, but Rachel was stunningly beautiful. And it was Rachel that Jacob loved.**

**So Jacob answered, “I will work for you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.”**

**It is far better,” said Laban, “that I give her to you than marry her to some outsider. Yes. Stay here with me.”**

**So Jacob worked seven years for Rachel. But it only seemed like a few days, he loved her so much.**

**Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife; I’ve completed what we agreed I’d do. I’m ready to consummate my marriage.” Laban invited everyone around and threw a big feast. At evening, though, he got his daughter Leah and brought her to the marriage bed, and Jacob slept with her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid.)**

**Morning came: There was Leah in the marriage bed!**

**Jacob confronted Laban, “What have you done to me? Didn’t I work all this time for the hand of Rachel? Why did you cheat me?”**

**“We don’t do it that way in our country,” said Laban. “We don’t marry off the younger daughter before the older. Enjoy your week of honeymoon, and then we’ll give you the other one also. But it will cost you another seven years of work.”**

**Jacob agreed. When he’d completed the honeymoon week, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.**

He meets her. He kisses her. He loves her. Such is the stuff of many a Hollywood hit. . . .

Ok, so the kiss is one of those family kisses. Still, it soon becomes clear that Rachel is the girl who claims Jacob’s heart. After all, we’re told she is stunningly beautiful! All very Hollywood.

But there is a problem. Jacob is a bit short on cash and he knows that Laban is not about to marry off a prize daughter for nothing. So Jacob offers to work for Laban for seven years to earn Rachel as a wife and Laban agrees. We’re told that though Jacob labored for seven long years, it seemed to him like only a few days. That’s love!!

When the big day came, Laban pulls a fast one on Jacob. On the wedding night, Laban slips Leah, Rachel’s older sister, into the wedding tent in Rachel’s place and Jacob never notices the switch. All I can figure is that there must have been a lot of veils and a very dark tent!

In any event, in the morning Jacob confronts Laban about the switch. What’s been done cannot be undone. A marriage has been consummated and Leah is his wife now, not the beloved Rachel. But Laban still dangles Rachel out in front of Jacob, telling him that for another seven years of labor Jacob can marry her too. And he does. Jacob works another seven years, making it fourteen years total that he has sacrificed in order to be with Rachel.

Yes, Jacob is finally going to be married to Rachel, but Laban has made complete ruin of it all. Poor Leah was forced into a marriage she didn’t want, knowing that Jacob’s heart belonged to her sister. Rachel endured seven years of watching Leah as Jacob’s wife alone. And Jacob gave fourteen years to the deceiving Laban.

Further, out of all this there must come children, for Jacob is the bearer of the covenant and there must be heirs to the promise if Abraham’s family is ever to be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5).

Sadly, it is the need for children that gives rise to yet another rivalry. This time it will be sister against sister, as Leah is able to have children but Rachel remains childless. The biblical writer tells us that God saw that Leah was unloved and opened her womb.

Leah gives birth to four sons. In her frustration, Rachel sends into Jacob’s bed her maid, a legal surrogate, to bear a child who will be Rachel’s. When Leah proves unable to have more children herself, she also sends in a legal surrogate. It is a bona fide baby-making competition. If you’ve wondered how Jacob could end up with so many sons – here is your answer! It is Jacob’s many sons who will be the patriarchs of Israel’s twelve tribes.

In the end, Rachel herself is finally able to have a baby, a boy, whom she names Joseph. Knowing how much Jacob loved Rachel, we can understand why Joseph becomes his father’s favorite and the envy of his brothers, who resent even a multi-color coat made for Joseph by his father – but more on that story Wednesday.

For now, reflect on Jacob and Rachel. What a love they must have shared. Fourteen years they waited to be married. Though tricked and swindled, they pressed on, determined to be together. Through all the twists and turns, they never lost their love.

This story reminds us that the best synonym for love is sacrifice. Jacob’s love for Rachel goes far beyond mere feelings. He gives up many years of his life for her, for them. In this, Jacob’s love foreshadows the love of Christ, who didn’t just give up fourteen years of life for you and me, he gave up life itself. I think that if Paul ran into Jacob one day and said, “You want to know what love is, look to the cross,” Jacob would know just what Paul was talking about.

*Marriage as an aspect of our discipleship*

Isaac marries Rebekah. Jacob marries Rachel and Leah. Solomon had 300 wives. Yes, the patriarchs and kings practiced plural marriage, as was common to ancient cultures. Nonetheless, in the biblical view, marriage is a covenant between husband and wife and it is a covenant before God. The UMC affirms “the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman.”

As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to a way of life in which marriage is a covenantal commitment and a witness to others. The writer of Hebrews urges disciples to honor their marriage, mirroring God’s faithfulness in their faithfulness to each other. The apostle Paul urges married disciples in Corinth to stay with unbelieving spouses so that the unbeliever might come to know Christ (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). He further urges husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and to love their wives just as they love themselves (Ephesians 5:25-33).

In a sermon for the wedding of two friends, Richard Hays, an ordained pastor and preeminent New Testament scholar, wrote:

“Thus, in making the covenant of marriage, you make a covenant to love one another as God has loved you – that means to love one another unconditionally, freely, sacrificially. In making the covenant of marriage, you promise to become servants of one another in love. In making the covenant of marriage, you form a union that reflects the love of God and stands as a *sign* of God’s love in the world. Marriage is a sacrament in the true sense: it is both sign and vehicle of grace.”

The marriage of disciples is not so much about the feelings of love, as wonderful as they may be, marriage is about the *practice* of love. We do not marry to meet our own needs nor to help us be fulfilled. Marriage is two partners, each seeking good for the other, each sacrificing for the other, each living out a deep and abiding covenant that endures the inevitable difficulties. This is God’s hope for us. Philip Yancey writes, “I went into marriage thinking love would hold us together. I learned instead that it required marriage to learn what love means . . . a unity sealed by God.”

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott