

FINDING YOUR MARRIAGE PARTNER

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss

Readings: Genesis 29:1-2,7-12,15-18,20

This is quite a special story we read today, and there are some beautiful moments in it. Jacob had been rather selfish while he was growing up. He was more interested in himself than in other people. When our story starts, Jacob is running away from his home because he had treated his brother Esau badly, and his brother was angry with him. So Jacob was traveling to the place where his uncle, a man called Laban, lived.

He was alone and wondering what his life was going to be like, when he came upon a well in a field. Do you know how a well was dug in those days? People would dig a hole and often put something above it to hold a bucket on a long rope, so that they could draw the water out of the well. Then they would pour the water into a trough so that their animals could drink. The well that Jacob saw had a huge stone on top of it, covering its mouth. You can probably guess why the stone was there. It was there so that things did not fall into the well and make it dirty and so that no people or animals would fall in and drown.

There were flocks of sheep around the well, and there were some shepherds with them. Jacob asked the shepherds why they hadn't uncovered the well and given water to their flocks yet. They explained that because the stone was so large, they needed to wait until everyone had gathered with their sheep so that many people could help to lift the heavy stone.

Then Jacob asked the shepherd if they knew Laban. They did know Laban, and they said to Jacob, "Look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep" (Genesis 29:6). That was a wonderful moment in Jacob's life, when he looked across the field and saw this beautiful girl coming toward him with her father's sheep. Right away, he fell in love with her. Instead of loving only himself, he began to love someone else at least as much as himself.

Jacob was so excited to see Rachel that he moved the big stone off the well all by himself. Then he gave water to the sheep that she had brought. Rachel must have wondered what was happening. Then, Jacob came up to her and kissed her. He was a grown man, but he cried for joy because he was so happy. Then he told her who he was, that he was the son of her father's sister. She told her father, and Jacob went to stay with them, and he worked for his uncle Laban.

After a month, Laban asked Jacob what he should pay him for his work. "You have been working for me for a month. What shall I pay you?" Jacob replied, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter" (Genesis 18). Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, and he was willing to work for her for seven

years. Laban agreed to this. So Jacob worked for Laban for seven years. And those years felt like only a few days because Jacob loved Rachel so much. As he worked, he thought about marrying her, and the time seemed to pass quickly away.

This beautiful story is going to be told in one way or another in each one of your lives because from the beginning of your birth the Lord has prepared for you to be married as well. He prepared Jacob and Rachel to love each other. Rachel was growing up in Haran, a long way from where Jacob grew up. Neither of them knew they were going to marry each other. The Lord knew, but they didn't. Then suddenly, when they were about twenty years old, they met. It was a surprise to them but not to the Lord. They were prepared for marriage and neither of them knew this.

We are told that married love is the most special love that two people can have. People who truly love each other in marriage here on earth, will live forever as an angel couple in heaven. Sometimes for people right here on earth, it happens even more beautifully than it did for Jacob. Sometimes you meet a person who you know you will love, not just for all of your life, but forever in heaven. That is a beautiful moment. Sometimes in this life people do not find their marriage partners but, if they go to heaven, then it will happen in the other world instead.

Sometimes children die and go to the other world, and they grow up in heaven. We are told that, as a young man and a young woman grow up in heaven, the Lord prepares for them to meet. When they do meet, right away, they look at each other and know. The young man thinks to himself, "She is mine." And the young woman thinks to herself, "He is mine." They think this in their hearts for while and then they tell each other of their love. This is a very special moment.

The Lord wants this wonderful love to happen to each one of you. Hopefully, sooner or later everyone of you will meet this person who is special to you. You may not know right away like Jacob did, or like people in heaven do. It might take a little while. In fact, that might be good, because you want to get to know the character of the person, whether he or she is good. You want to know whether you agree on how you will worship the Lord, how you will live your life, and how you will raise your children. That is very important.

The greatest present the Lord gives you is one special person that you will love above everyone else. Somewhere in this world there is that person. You may not have met him or her yet. You may not meet that person for another ten, fifteen or twenty years. But when you do, and when you really know each other, the Lord will speak to your heart. Then you will know this is the person the Lord made for you to live in happiness with for all eternity.

Amen.