

Never Give up, Never Give in  
 Genesis 29:15-28  
 July 26, 2020  
 Preaching in The Age of COVID-19  
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I'm sorry you want me to begin again? You want me to start anew? Just because Laban, the guy in charge, has changed the rules, I have to do it all over again? Because you didn't tell me in the beginning that the game was rigged and the house always wins?

This is what I imagine, Jacob, the second son of Isaac and Rebecca, the younger brother of Esau, is saying to himself and to anyone who will listen, when he realizes that he has spent seven long years working to prove his worthiness to Laban, his potential future father-in-law.

Jacob said "I will work for you," and Laban said, "What would you like to be paid?"  
 Jacob said, "I'd love to marry your youngest daughter Rachel."  
 Laban said, "Ok."

Seven years came and went and the wedding day came, and the wedding night went and Jacob woke in the morning and really took a look at the woman in his bed, and well in the light of day, he sees that it is not Rachel whom he loved, but Leah, her older sister. (Don't get me started on how it took him until morning to realize it wasn't Rachel, that's another sermon.)

Jacob says to Laban, "I asked for Rachel, and yet last night I slept with Leah."  
 Laban replied, "Yes you did. It is not the custom here to give the younger sister in marriage before the older. Work for me for seven more years and then you may also have Rachel as your wife."

Seven more years, I have to work for you, do the work for you again, for seven more years? And Jacob did. Seven more years he worked for Laban. He worked for Laban because he wanted and longed for Rachel. Of course the story and the ins and outs of their family life does not end here, and all that happens has always made us wonder and cringe when people say they embrace biblical family values, but that too is a sermon for a different day.

What I'm struck by in this passage and in our lives today, is that our world is not always fair. The rules that are in play, some are written, posted and known, and others, like the rules that Laban quoted to Jacob the morning after his wedding feast, some rules are not known by all, some rules, some customs are only known to those in charge.

Sometimes we who long for change, we who long for something different, something better, something beautiful, sometimes when we reach a point where we think we have accomplished our goal, when say perhaps an African American has become President, sometimes we think our world really has changed. But then the veil gets lifted, and the

morning comes and we realize, we who were a bit myopic, that the world has not changed, this is not what we longed for. A man who happens to be Black may have been our president, but racism still prevails, racism is so, so very real. And like Jacob, we cannot settle, we cannot give up, we who long for something more, all of us, must lift our heads up high and get on back to doing the work that will change the way of our world. Like Congressman John Lewis, as he said, may we, “Never give up. Never give in. Never become hostile... Hate is too big a burden to bear.”

May we speak truth to power, may we model and lead, what it means and what it looks like to get in trouble, good trouble, always keeping our eye on that prize of a good and gracious world.

It's time my friends, to return to the work, the faith-filled Christian work, of creating a world in which all of us belong, all of us are safe, all of us are loved. We cannot give up now: in our congregations, in our communities, in our families, we must do the work, like Jacob did, we cannot give up now.