

Life In the Real World
Genesis 29:15-30; Romans 8:26-39

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Let me begin by saying something that, I hope, doesn't need to be said. But even though it doesn't need to be said, it's still important to say it. What I want to say is this: the way Leah and Rachel are treated in this story is horrible. It is absolutely awful. No one should be treated this way. Jacob learns an important lesson, that Karma can turn around and bite you, but a horrible price is paid not just by Leah and Rachel but by Zilpah and Bilhah as well.

Nevertheless, this is the Word of God for us. It tells us something about God and so we don't write it off as just a horrible example of ancient misogyny (which it certainly is). We look at it carefully to try and discern God's loving hand in it.

When we look at our passage closely, what we see is something we see again and again throughout our Scriptures. God is working God's will through terribly flawed people. God is working God's will through terribly, terribly flawed people. I'm not excusing anyone for being terribly flawed. But I am saying God is not waiting around for perfect people and perfect families to accomplish God's will. God is working God's will with whoever is there, regardless of how horribly dysfunctional they may be.

And this is surprising to many, both believers and non-believers. Many of us, both believers and non-believers, think God only works through perfect people who live in some sort of Christian Barbie Land where everyone is happy and life in plastic is fantastic.

Last week, Sunday afternoon, I walked over to the theater and paid my money and watched Barbie. I have to say I thought it was a hoot. An absolute scream. Yes, it's rated PG for a reason. It raises some uncomfortable questions that are probably not best for

small children, though I suspect they would all go over a child's head. And there's some mother-daughter tension that seems to be bang on. Obviously, I've never been a mother or a daughter, but I've known a few and the conflict these two face seems pretty believable.

So, yes, the movie is problematic but Barbie Land, where all the Barbies live, is a scream. It's total fun, fun, fun, every day is the best day ever, the shower is never cold, the milk is never spoiled, and everyone knows how to dance. In Barbie Land, no one ever suffers. There is no suffering in Barbie Land.

But Barbie Land is fake. It's fiction. A movie. There is no Christian Barbie Land. Christians live in the real world. In the real world there are heat waves, sexism, racism, addiction, and overdoses. In the real world there are diseases, wars, and human trafficking. In the real world there are mass shootings at public concerts and elementary schools. In the real world there is crime, hunger, disfunction and death. In the real world, suffering is real. In the real world, where Christians live, suffering is real. In the real world, where Christians live, suffering is real. It's enough to drive a Christian to despair.

Despair is common in our world and maybe in our lives. But as Christians we have the great antidote to despair. We believe in a God of resurrection. We believe in a God who can make things new. Not only that, we believe in a God who is perfectly capable of working through massive disfunction, who isn't waiting around for perfect people in order to effect the divine will. We believe in a God whose love is the most powerful force in the universe. And this God loves us. God loves us.

This is where Paul comes in. Paul packs a lot in these few verses. I'm not going to try and unpack it all right now. For right now, let me pick up on two themes from our Romans text that I think are especially important. The first is Predestination.

Predestination is a long and tedious topic, but basically most of us today would say, in Jesus Christ we are all predestined to be

loved by God. In Jesus Christ, we are all predestined to be loved by God. God's love is not something we need to earn or purchase or inherit from our parents. We don't have to kill dragons, cross rivers, or volunteer at the Blessings Pantry. God's love is not something we have to absorb by going to church enough or watching worship on Facebook Live enough.

In Jesus Christ, God has predestined all of us to be loved. That includes you, and me, and those we love, and those we haven't yet learned to love. In Jesus Christ the politician we hate, the world leader we despise, the person who hurt us way back when and whom we steadfastly refuse to forgive, in Jesus Christ they, and we, are all predestined to be loved.

And you know what, and this is the second theme I want to bring up, nothing can ever separate us from God's love.

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(Romans 8:28-39)

Nothing can ever separate us from God's love. That includes you and me. Nothing we can do is so awful, so horrible, so heinous, God would ever turn God's back on us. No matter how many vows we break, lives we ruin or sins we embrace, God's love is such that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It would be nice to live in Barbie Land. It would be nice to live in a place where everyone is happy and gets along and no one is ever sick or sad. But we as Christians don't live there. We Christians live in the Real World. We live in the world where people are abused, where there is pollution and violence and oppression. We live in the world where medical care is not equal for all, where systemic poverty is real, where the place of our birth and the color of our skin count for more than the content of our character. We

live in the world where Laban, and Jacob, and Leah, and Rachel, and Zilpah and Bilhah are our neighbors. We Christians live in the world where extreme disfunction is real.

The good news, and remember with God there is always good news, the good news is God's love is stronger than any human disfunction. The good news is God is working through our disfunction even now. The good news is when it all seems too much, when it seems our disfunction is tearing us apart, when it all seems overwhelming and we are praying with sighs too deep for words, the Holy Spirit is with us.

When the real world seems too much for us, God's Holy Spirit is with us reminding us in Jesus Christ we are all of us, all of us, predestined to be loved. And not only are we predestined to be loved – nothing, nothing, can separate us from that love. Not even human disfunction. My friends, this is how much God loves us. Thanks be to God! Amen.