

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

July 27, 2008

Proper 12

Genesis 29:15-28

Romans 8:26-39

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

For the last three weeks I have been in Chicago, completing the second year of my residency requirement for my Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Development. During this time we had classes regarding Church Systems, Leadership, Stewardship, and as I said a couple weeks ago, 4 stimulating days about writing a thesis, and crafting an argument. (Actually, in truth, the sessions regarding writing a thesis were quite enjoyable.)

On almost everyday of the residency I added books and articles to the list of books that I was feeling the need to read during our two week vacation at Mackinaw. As I scanned that list this past Monday, I was horrified as I realized that there were no novels on my reading list. All my books were either about history, theology, or leadership. How depressing, what a waste. Thanks to the wonders of the internet, I broadcast an urgent plea to members of the congregation asking for suggestions. Over the past few days I have heard from dozens of you with suggestions of novels. I thank you. Not only have I added dozens of books to my list, I have also added two weeks to my vacation time. (Just kidding) So many books, so little time. I made the decision, that Congregational development, theology, and leadership can wait. For the next two weeks its time to read some good novels.

Ironically, one of the other members of the class I am in told me this past Thursday that as past of her sermon preparation, she is always reading at least one novel.

Over the last many weeks, we have been reading from the first book of the bible, the book of Genesis. In Genesis we have found everything we could possibly find in a great novel: love and romance, seduction, envy, passion, greed, deceit and murder. It is all there, in this first book. What a great reminder to us during these summer months, that even from the beginning, God also loves a good novel.

This weekend's Genesis reading continues this good story. Jacob falls deeply in love with Rachel. He labors for 7 years for the right to marry her, only to be deceived. On his wedding night, Laban sends Leah to Jacob instead of Rachel. When he discovers this deception, Jacob though angered, professes his love again for Rachel and promises to work another 7 years for the right to marry her.

Now, before we feel too badly for Jacob, let us remember that he has a life history of deception. Remember how he deceived his father Isaac and stole the birthright of his brother Essau. Jacob has only received a taste of his own medicine. In the chapters from Genesis to follow, we will read how Rachel was unable to conceive, and so sons were born to Jacob through Leah and her servants. Jacob became Israel, and his twelve sons were the twelve tribes of Israel. It is only after 11 sons were born to Leah and her maidservants that Rachel finally conceive and bore Joseph, who of course was sold into slavery by his elder brothers.

Genesis is truly an epic novel with all of the passion, all of the treachery, all of the deceit that we could ever find in the greatest of novels and in the most dysfunctional of families. Is it any wonder that the people of God have been in such a state of chaos and dysfunction through history??? It has been chaos and dysfunction from the beginning.

And yet, and yet, and yet, it is in the midst of such chaos and dysfunction that God works. It is through such imperfect people that God acts. So it was in the beginning. So it is today. God works in the chaos of our life. God acts in and through our imperfect lives. Has anybody ever told you that you should write a

book about your life? If so, what be included. Stories of success and achievement, of course. But also, if we are honest, stories of failure, and brokenness. In some chapters we would be the hero and some the villain. We would be proud of some chapters and ashamed of others. If last week were a chapter in the book, think of the what you would include, stories of illness, of relaxation, of stress at work, of delights at home, of financial and health worries. I am sure there in each chapter of your life story there would be laughter and tears, delight and failure, pride and shame. And, in and through each of those stories, in and through each of your stories, God works.

The story of Jacob and Laban, and Leah and Rachel, are holy, not because they are perfect, but because God is at work through them. Your life story is holy, imperfect as it is, because God is at work in you. God is working through your life, not just the perfect loving successful paragraphs, but each and every paragraph, every sentence, every word, every comma, every doodle on the page. God has made every story of your life just as holy as every story of the bible.

Paul's letter to the Roman this morning was written many hundreds of years after Genesis. It was written many hundreds of years ago. Paul was writing in the midst of the hardship and terrors of the first decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus. He was writing in the midst of the hardships and terror of his own life. He was writing convinced that in knowing the love and mercy of Jesus, he knew that end of the story of the history of the world. He knew that in the midst of the terror and hardships of his day, God was achieving the divine purpose. Paul knew that in spite of all the hardships of his day, nothing would prevent creation from achieving its destiny of glorification. Paul knew that no powers of this world would prevent God from bringing history to fulfillment. You might say, that while Paul did not know all the details of the story, he knew the author. Knowing the author, Paul knew that the ending of the story would be too marvelous to be imagined.

So good friends, I head off to Mackinaw, for two weeks of readings, two weeks where I confess I hope to read more novels than theology. I go off, knowing that the novels I read are holy, because they tell holy stories of human life. I go off reminded that God is still writing a holy story in the holy lives of imperfect people---God is writing a holy story in your holy imperfect lives. I go off, reminded that God is the author of the story of history, and the that in the end, by God's grace, nothing will separate us from the love of God. Really, to say that is to say nothing more, nothing less than saying, that in the end, in the loving mercy of God, all of us, imperfect people though we are, will be graced to live, happily ever after.