

**Sermon: 2020/07/26 (8th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A) -
Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11,45b; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew
13:31-33,44-52_BTR**

[Have a baseball. And a glove.]

Has anyone ever thrown you a "curve-ball"?

I can honestly say: never.

It has *never* happened to me.

I'm speaking literally, you see.

Because to throw "a curve-ball" is something that happens only in baseball, right?

And I'm English.

And these items that you see I'm holding are *absolutely* foreign to me.

As much as sushi or a boomerang or an igloo.

Now, if we were discussing cricket...that would be a different matter.

But to throw a "curve-ball" - if I understand these things correctly, from having researched them on Wikipedia - is when the pitcher - "puts some spin" on the ball as he releases it, and to do that he has to hold the ball in a *very* particular way.

And what's peculiar about a "curve-ball" is how it moves through the air, defying our normal expectations, *bending away and then suddenly* curving into its destination.

Now, if I was speaking figuratively:

then my answer would be: "On many occasions."

On *many* occasions life has indeed thrown me a "curve-ball."

That is to say, something suddenly "crossed my path" that surprised me - and not in a nice way;

"something" that I hadn't seen coming.

You might say that the definition of a "curve-ball" is one of those rude, unwelcome interruptions into daily life that we *really* wish would *never* happen; that we didn't plan for.

A death in the family.

A frightening health diagnosis.

Losing one's job.

Spousal infidelity.

And so on.

And Jacob is thrown an *astonishing* "curve-ball" today in our reading from the Old Testament; from *Genesis* (chapter twenty-nine).

Despite his best laid plans and good intentions, he ends up marrying the ugly, older sister of the pretty, young one he *meant* (and hoped) to marry.

How, exactly, had this thing happened? (You ask yourself. And rightly so.)

We can't say.

It seems *very* odd.

Almost hard to believe.

Yes, Leah was veiled.

The wedding maybe performed at night.

And candlelight isn't as effective; *as bright* as its electrical counterpart, but...*come on!* Really?!

But then we probably, unconsciously, imagine this scenario occurring following *western, modern* courtship, which can last *many* months - even years - after dates and flirting, perhaps some sex, even cohabitation; when, actually, the groom and bride in *our* text had had almost *no* "alone-time" (together) *whatsoever* (before the wedding).

And even body-shape and so on would have been, up to that point, *heavily* disguised under voluminous, billowous clothing according to the fashion of the period. [n.1]

And only the sound of Rachel's voice, her eyes and mannerisms would have been familiar to Jacob, and, almost *certainly*, he was...how shall I put this delicately: *well* "hydrated" when the time to consummate came.

But this is a digression.

Let's not get distracted:

as the popular bumper-sticker used to say: defecation occurs.

Please excuse me.

But then picture Jacob's *horror*.

His utter *outrage*.

Seven years he worked to prove himself.

As a shepherd.

Dirty, boring and, in the Middle East, *hot*, sweaty work.

In other words, to return to our theme: Life had thrown Jacob the *mother* of all "curve-balls," and it was his *father-in-law's* fault.

And this pandemic has been a *thoroughly* disturbing "curve-ball" for pretty much everyone.

So, what do we learn?

About "curve-balls"?

About how we, *as Christians*, should *respond* when they are "thrown" our way.

Well, lesson one, our text makes something clear:

life is turbulent; it is *random*.

It is full and over-flowing with unkindness and disaster and disease.

And knowing and loving God does *not* protect you from this fact;

it is no guarantee against "curve-balls."

After all, just consider how close God was to Jacob.

They had an enviably *intimate* relationship.

Consider that Jacob had had something most of us have not, which is a *theophany* - much like Saint Paul on the road to Damascus.

(A visible, actual vision of the Divine.)

And Jacob *knew* - didn't just believe, but *knew* - that he was the linchpin of the divine plan - an integral part of God's purposes for humanity - which, let's face it, you and I are not - and yet, still, there were, for him, "curve-balls."

And there always will be "curve-balls" until Jesus returns.

Lesson two:

Lesson two from our text today is a lesson as to how a holy person should *respond* when those "curve-balls" come at you, "thick n'fast."

And what did we see?

What example does Jacob offer?

One of resilience.

Adaptability.

Stoicism.

Jacob just accepts that this *crazy*, unpleasant thing has happened to him, and he "hardly misses a beat."

"Okay," he thinks, "that's not what I hoped for. So, Plan B."

There isn't a tantrum.

There isn't a long, self-pitying Shakespearean monologue.

Jacob is *no* Hamlet: "Oh, woe is me; woe is me."

Rather, he *presses* onward.

Yes, he critiques Laban - Leah and Rachel's father - for being deceptive.

He articulates too the justification for the complaint, *and then he presses onward*.

And again, let me remind you - *seven years of hard work* had been invested to win the girl he loved.

All that time - all those lovely nights out in the field with the goats risking his neck against lions, wolves, and so on - 2,555 of them to be precise - when he thought he was going to get Cinderella, and then "the morning after" wakes up to find one of the ghastly step-sisters lying next to him wearing the glass-slipper.

I think I'd just have given up at this point.

Downloaded the "Match" app and left it all in the "hands" of an algorithm to find a suitable partner.

So how?

How can I "press" on with *Jacob's* attitude?

In the face of loss.

Against adversity.

When there's opposition.

When there's danger.

Well, for the sake of a 'treasure', says Jesus.
An *incomparable* 'treasure'.
A 'treasure' that doesn't rust or can't be stolen.
You can give it away.
You can choose to forsake it; neglect it.
Disregard it.
But no one else can take it from you - this 'treasure'.
And its your *salvation*.
The promise of a second, *eternal* life.
A destination without peer or equal.

Imagine yourself, then, about to embark on a car journey.
To a place beyond your wildest dreams.
Somewhere you've always longed to go.
A place at the top of your "bucket list" but even better than that.
You saved your money.
Took extra shifts.
Worked a long time to meet all those deadlines for the boss.
And you set off and you're on your way....
And then the car breaks down.
The engine warning lights come on.
A "curve-ball."
What would you do?
Just give up.
Decide to turn back?
Go home again.
No!
You would "thumb" your way there.
Hike.
Run.
Take a train.
Get an Uber.
And this is discipleship.
Being *disciplined*.
Heaven is worth the hardship.
It really is.
But do you believe that?
I do.
So, let me challenge you, then, to be like Jacob.
(This is also my challenge.)
To be like Jacob - focusing not on problems but solutions.
To be the solution (yourself) - to "curveballs."

By courage and conviction.

Footnotes:

1. Bedouin woman from 19th c. -



