**“The Genesis of Joseph”**

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Genesis 30:22-24

Ash Wednesday

**SERMON READING** Genesis 30:22-24

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” And she called his name Joseph, saying, “May the Lord add to me another son!”

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Ten weeks ago, we celebrated the birth of a baby—the Savior, Christ the Lord. Angels sang about **His** birth. Shepherds hastened to **His** manger to see **Him**. Wise Men sought and found **Him**. Conceived by the Holy Spirit through the Word of its announcement by an angel and born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus came to **save His people from their sins**. That’s **WHY** **He came**. In response to that, we sang (and sing) “Joy to the world!” But joy is how it’s supposed to be whenever **any** baby is born.

**3**

Tonight, though, we begin a Lenten journey toward that cross and sacrifice of Jesus … and we do so with the **Old Testament figure of Joseph**. **His** Genesis (or getting here into the course of history) wasn’t very joyful. Rachel, his mother, wasn’t yet a mom … and it appeared that she might never be.

You may remember Rachel. Love at first sight is what it was for Jacob when he first saw the beautiful shepherd girl watering her father’s flock. He worked so that he could marry her seven years for her father just to, then, be cheated of it / deceived by Laban and given the older sister, Leah, instead. He did finally **also** get to marry Rachel (then have two wives) but that at the cost of another seven years of labor for the father-in-law.

Finally marrying Rachel, **she** could bare no children for Jacob. Her sister did (and lots / six sons and a daughter). Beyond that, **Rachel’s maidservant** and **Leah’s maidservant** each bore to Jacob two sons (quite different rules then now on more than one wife and birthing through servants, which we’ll need the Lord to explain to us once we get to Heaven), but we know that He wanted Jacob to have **twelve sons overall**. Eleven babies / ten sons by three different women … but **none to Rachel**.

The others (in births) were likely **not joyful** to Rachel (in fact, stressful with jealousy were, probably, the other births to her). Every cry of a new baby was, before, **emotionally embittering** to Rachel, **reminding her (each one) of her barrenness**.

And **Rachel barren** was a problem more than of just procreation. It was **spiritual** **/ of faith**. Children were God’s gifts, and Rachel had to **watch others get what she wasn’t given**. She felt shamed by God, and maybe **on purpose** she might have thought. “Did it signal the His displeasure with her?” Was the Lord testing her? Why did her most desperate of prayers seem **unanswered**? Why did she **feel forsaken by God**?”

So Rachel took matters into her own hands and contributed by giving her maid to Jacob, hoping that her maid’s child would count as her own …

… which is **where we intersect with Rachel**. Some of us have, no doubt, struggled with fertility issues and know **that** heartbreak, but all struggle with patience and faith and trust in God. None of us need be infertile to share the pains of **prayers that seem to go unanswered by God**. Everybody has known the challenge of having to try to **“wait upon the timing and will of God”**. And we’ve likely all gone through the regressions: from sadness to bitterness, and bitterness to anger, and anger to despair, so have (maybe even) taken things into our own hands that should have stayed with God; angry with Him, setting Him aside to try and gain something that we think we ought have **in spite of Him**. **Sin** might be our impatience and lack of trust in Him.

**2**

But a two-word phrase from tonight’s reading changed everything: “God remembered”. From verse 22 of Genesis 30, **“God remembered Rachel”**. When all hope, for her, seemed to have dried up, with faith barely flickering (if at all), **“God remembered”**. **He’d heard her plea indeed and listened lovingly, and (in the timing He planned) opened her womb**. She conceived and bore a son. And that son was Joseph. **His Genesis was, actually, the pre-ordained plan that carried out how God delivered His people through him … pointing us to Jesus … and His deliverance**.

“God **remembered** Rachel” … and “remembering” (that one) is **more than just recollecting**. When God remembers, He acts.

Notice, tonight, how God had acted for not just patient people, but for, even, a blessed outcome for people **adopted His** through trials and shameful situations. **“God remembered Rachel” … in her impatience**. “He’s gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”.

“God **remembered Rachel**” and she **gave birth to a son**. She named the son Joseph and was, now, **joyful** … her **shame taken away**. He would **remind that “GOD’S REMEMBRING IS REDEMPTION AND FORGIVENESS / SALVATION OFFORED TO A SINFUL WORLD”**. His name **means** **“may he add”**, Joseph does, and in choosing that name Rachel confessed a hope in **whatever blessings God had in store for her further**. It was a **renewed trust in God** that Rachel expressed, proclaiming: “May the Lord add to me another son!”, **(this time) she’d left up to God to provide if it’s His will** **…**

**1**

**…** and it was, because it was “**another Son” to the family line (and all of us)** that **we’re here to remember**. “God remembered Rachel” with Joseph, and **us (with her)** **all the more with Jesus**. Not **through her born**, but **to her born and for her and us all born and sent**, “God remembered” by delivering **His Son through Jacob and the circumstances of this story**. And Jesus, (**forsaken really** where she’d, only, thought she was by God) was **the sacrifice forsaken by the Father so that He’d never have to forsake any of us**.

Lent’s forty days are for **our “remembering”**. What **we have to remember** is our sins and all the ways we’ve not trusted God and wandering off on our own away from Him and impatient to “**await His ways**”. We’ll remember Judas and the notion of **betrayal**, Peter and **denial** of the Lord, Pilate and his **bad decision regarding Him**, and we’ll remember Joseph and his brother’s evil and Joseph’s struggles to trust in God but, ultimately, doing so and forgiving people as Jesus will forgive him.

Yet, Lent’s not anywhere near as much about **our** “**remembering**” as it is **God’s**. As He remembered Rachel, He remembered Joseph … and He **remembers us**. In that remembering, He **acted**, and **still does**. God **acted for us** in the sacrificial death of His Son for our salvation and life. He raised Him to show us our resurrection to life. He announced promises **now, acting** through the preached Word and the cleansing of sins confessed by Absolution. He acts in the promises of Baptism and in the bread and wine where He allows us to participate in Him and His body and blood and life. “God **remembers**” … and that’s a **remembering of you** in His **saving of you through His Son**.

And if it **feels** less than glorious, or missed somehow, the Lord declares: “Yet even now return to Me with all your heart”, which is **Ash Wednesday’s message as to our need**, “Return to the Lord”. “He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Hear it through even the smallest of these three words: **“Yet even now”** announcing the gift of an **abundance of grace upon confession**. Even after Rachel’s impatience, even after hardened hearts on our part, “even now”, God wants us to know ourselves (thankfully) “**remembered by Him**”. Amen.