

Sermon Text for April 24, 2016

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Mark 9:38-41, Genesis 31:43-55

“Good Nuff”

Over the past three months your session has begun their meetings, after worship, with watching and discussing videos that speak to a philosophy called orange which encourages every aspect of the church to speak with one voice and focus and concentrate upon the relationships that God wants between us and with those outside of these walls. The focus is on relationships and a recognition that God’s kingdom is built on a relationship between us and Jesus and relationships between God’s creation, us, and with each other.

Today’s Scripture highlights our protagonist and the relationships that he builds and creates in his life. If you haven’t noticed Jacob is not one of my favorite characters. I should have known with a name that means usurper what would you expect. But we have seen that Jacob has met his match in craftiness with his Father in law to the point where their relationship becomes strained and not ideal.

We see the culmination of this tension in Scripture today and we are left with an agreement to agree to disagree. Laban and Jacob today settle for something less than the ideal, less than what God would want, they settle for something that in the end makes nobody happy. They say this is good nuff. When I think of those who settle I can’t help but think of a commercial that is currently being shown on TV today –

My girls say that instead of the settlers they should call that commercial the Bronkemas, come on, we aren’t that bad are we? But today what we discover is that God never wants us to settle for less than what His vision and His goal is for our life and for our church.

I bet not many of you have heard a sermon preached on these Scriptures in the past. For me it is a very clear indication of two people not able to realize God’s plan for their lives so they settle, they say this has to be good nuff and they accept it as it is, and not as it should be.

In my ministry I come across so many people who at one time have had dreams and visions and expectations of a life that could be, only to find as time progresses that they have to settle for something far less than what they know they could achieve or be. Today we are going to see how not to be settlers, how never to say good nuff and to pursue the dream that God wants for our lives.

But we have to do it within the context of our Scripture which is Jacob, the son of Isaac, the brother of Esau, the father of Joseph, and the son in law of Laban. Jacob has met his match

in Laban. While Jacob tricked his brother and his father so Laban tricked Jacob by marrying off both of his daughters to him for 14 years of labor. We skipped over the 6 years that he worked for hi in order to get his flocks. We didn't read about Laban smuggling out Jacob's flocks so that he would be left with nothing or Jacob's trickery of creating flocks of his own.

So if you even thought your relationship with your in laws was rocky, it is nothing compared to what is going on between Jacob and Laban in these Scriptures. There is this passive aggressive interplay here and no one addresses the wrongs that they have done to each other, until today, until we read this Scripture.

But before today Jacob decides to pick up and leave after 20 years of basically slave labor to Laban with his wives, and his children and his flocks. It is time for him to break up a family of Laban and his daughters and create his own nuclear family with he and his wife. This is what happens in marriage. The son and the daughter become one so that the nuclear family is no longer the son of the daughter but the husband and the wife.

But Jacob decides to leave and to fulfill God's promise of residing and claiming the land that God has promised him. He is going to take the land promised to Abraham and Isaac and now Jacob.

But Rachel, his beloved wife, as they flee in secret the house of her father, she steals the household gods that were to provide protection and promise to the family of Laban. This is a problem for a couple different reasons. First of all it highlights the differences between the cultures of Jacob and his family who believe in the God of Creation, the God of Israel, YHWH as opposed to Laban and his daughters who still held on to idol worship and had not followed the God who called Abraham out of his land.

Remember last week we saw the differences in culture between Jacob and Laban when he says: we don't do things that way around here. Today with the mention of Rachel stealing the household gods it just emphasizes that point. They flee Laban's home, Laban wakes up to find his family and his gods missing and pursues Jacob and his flock. He catches up to them 10 days later.

He searches Jacob and his family for his gods, finds nothing, Jacob confronts him with the injustices that he has been confronting for the last 20 years and then we find ourselves at our Scripture. Laban tells Jacob starting in vs.43 – all that I have I no longer have control over, you do, so let's make a deal. I can no longer influence you so let's make a covenant between us. We are not going to get along so let's come up with an agreement.

Vs. 52 gives us the agreement that they make between each other and it is an agreement that siblings and family members have been making for generations. If you are driving on a long trip with your brothers or if you are sitting on a couch or sharing a bed what is the first rule that is instituted? You draw an imaginary line and say this is my side and this is your side. Read 52, isn't this what Laban does?

We can't get along so let's just keep to our side. That's good nuff, we can settle on that. When Jesus is told by his beloved disciple that there is someone out there doing good in Jesus' name and healing people and giving Jesus the credit, they tried to stop him because they argued that he isn't one of us. But Jesus says, don't stop him. If they aren't against us then they are for us. In some way this person is contributing to the kingdom of God. We will take what we can get however we can get it.

Jesus' approach to his disciples is that our goal is to instill the kingdom of God here on this earth and any way that we can do it we will. Never settle for a limited perspective on how that kingdom can come about, as if God can only work through certain people. The goal is the kingdom and that is done in a variety of ways.

For Jacob and Laban the goal was not God's desire and wishes, but they were just tired at going at each other so they settled for a different goal which was peace without reconciliation, it was understanding without relationship. It was good enough for them but it should never be good enough for any of us for it falls far short of being good nuff for God. God wants Laban and Jacob to reconcile and have a relationship.

There is a temptation for us to settle. If we don't have a healthy relationship in our families we are okay to settle with you don't come on my side and I won't come on your side. That is not the ideal but it is good nuff, we think. Actually it is not. The same can be said for a husband and a wife who have settled into an existence together and not the relationship that they dreamed of or that God wants. Don't settle short of God's desire for you.

The same can be said in the church. Sometime we settle for disjointed programs that aren't based upon relationships with the people in those programs. We have all the programs, but if they don't all pursue the goal of God which is that each person who comes into contact with this church would become mature in Christ then it is better to have only one program that pursues that goal than 20 that don't. When we settle then we strive after that which is less than what God would want.