



## The Nourishing Vocation Project

### Engaging the Living Word

*Rachel - Genesis 30:1-24*

#### What is this particular text?

- Family Story
  - Ancestor story
- Genealogy story
- Conflict story
- Theology
- Promise

#### How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- Moves the covenant promises forward
- Tells of the birth of Jacob's descendants
- More clearly identifies the rivalry between Leah and Rachel in the names of their sons
- Portrays biblical narrative pattern of barrenness to conception to birth
- Portrays biblical narrative patterns of God working both through and in spite of human beings
- Depicts a God who remembers God's own

#### How can this text function in the church today?

- Calls the church to remember God's promises today
- Remember for the church to examine where/how it is present amid human longing and suffering
- Invitation to name our own emptiness, barrenness as church
- Challenge to be intentional about naming who God is calling us to remember today – and then actually lean into/embrace that remembering

#### What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- Evokes empathy
- Reminds of personal suffering
- Reminds of personal times of emptiness
- Frustrates me: life doesn't always move from emptiness to emptiness fulfilled
- Sadness, Sorrow
- Hope

#### What do you have to say to the text?

- Are Rachel and Leah more than characters in a divine drama?
- Though part of the historical, cultural practice, the use of the slave women is gut-wrenching
- I wish the women could tell their own story
- Barrenness – of a host of kinds – does not always meet with fulfillment
- Family systems – and their dysfunctions – are powerful

#### What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- Suffering is real
- Family systems are hard
- There is a fine line between passively waiting on the promises and being agents that work to fulfill God's promises

#### **What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)**

- Rivalries amid God's people are nothing new
- We want quick solutions to our problems, and sometimes take those solutions into our own hands in unhelpful ways
- We sometimes seek to create our own, quick solutions to problems that take time to resolve
- Temptation to reduce the Gospel to theologically empty clichés or tropes
  - wait on God, and everything will be fine
  - everything happens for a reason
  - God will provide if we are just patient enough
- Crises of our current time
  - Women's agency over their own bodies
  - We are an "instant gratification society:" we have no patience for waiting
  - Suffering makes us uncomfortable

#### **What do you see within yourself?**

- Times when my hopes have not been fulfilled
- Experiences of conflict within the church
- Times when hindsight was the only way to have insight

#### **What is the context – textual and historical?**

- Family narrative of Jacob
- Follows Jacob marrying both Leah and Rachel
- Amid the story of favoritism of Rachel over Leah
- Follows the narrative of Laban tricking Jacob into marrying Leah that is reminiscent of Jacob tricking Esau out of his birthright
- Sets up favoritism of Joseph by Jacob over his other sons

#### **What questions does this text raise for you?**

- How would Rachel and Leah tell their own stories?
- What about those who do not feel like they are remembered by God?
- What does it mean today to be remembered by God?
- Could Leah and Rachel have been anything but rivals?
- Are there any biblical stories about women that are not in some ways "texts of terror?"

#### **What words/themes seem of particular import?**

- Rivalry
- Barrenness/emptiness
- Promise
- Fulfillment
- Sorrow/hope
- Women –

#### **What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?**



- God hears
- God remembers
- God’s vision is bigger/broader than our own

**What is the as-over-againstness of this text?**

- Suffering is real
- Emptiness is real
- Not all emptiness is fulfilled
- Family systems can be painful
- Conflict can be generational
- Actions of one really do impact lives of others
- Naming human longings and suffering is not always comfortable
- Sometimes people don’t know how to hold space for others who name their longings/suffering

**Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?**

- God hears
- God remembers
- God acts
- The sorrow of the human experience matters to God

**What have others said about this text?**

- [“Her protracted infertility”](#) fits into a larger biblical pattern that signals the special importance of the child (Joseph) who finally arrives. In this sense, Rachel’s tragedy is also her triumph.”  
“Rachel,” by Amanda Mbuvi.

**What will I teach or proclaim?**

- You are not alone in your suffering
- Human longings are real: naming those longings is essential
- God remembers
- God calls us to hear the cries of suffering of others
- God calls us to be the ways that God remembers those who suffer
- Name that emptiness is not always filled – and wrestle with what that means

