**Messy Church – April 2021**

**Jacob, part 2 (arrival in Haran to his family in Palestine)**

The activities are:

1. **Meeting Rachel at the well –** make a well

Genesis 29: 1 – 14

1. **Jacob’s marriage and Laban’s trickery –** make masks

Genesis 29: 15 – 30

1. **Jacob’s children –** tube people

Genesis 29: 31 – Genesis 30: 24

1. **Jacob’s sheep and Laban’s trickery –** draw striped sticks

Genesis 30: 25 – 43

1. **Jacob leaves Laban –** packing for a journey

Genesis 31

1. **Jacob’s plan for meeting Esau**

Genesis 32: 1 – 21; Genesis 33

Story – no activity

1. **Jacob meets God**

Genesis 32: 22 – 32

Story – no activity

**Stories and Activities**

**1 Meeting Rachel at the well – make a well**

**You will need:** card, paint in browns and greys, paint brush or piece of sponge,

Cut out a circle of card for the top of the well, and use a length of straight card curved into a circle for the well walls. Make sure the top of the well will sit on the top of the walls. Paint the wall of the well as if it were built of stones, and the top as if it were one stone.

In the days when Jacob lived, the source of water for households and animals was the local well. It was owned by the community, and everyone shared. It was usual for different groups of people to go to the well at different times – people collecting water for family use might go in the early morning, while people bringing their animals to drink would go later in the day. Some communities had more than one source of water – one well close to the village or town, and one further away, in the fields, used for the animals of the community.

Remember that Jacob had left home to go to his mother’s relatives. He arrived in the area where the family lived, and found three flocks of sheep gathered round a well in the fields. He asked the shepherds where they were from, trying to find out if he had got to the right place, and they said that they were from Haran, which was exactly where Jacob was trying to get to. He asked about his uncle, Laban, and they said that his daughter, Rachel, was just coming with her sheep. Jacob rolled the stone away from the well, and all the sheep, including Rachel’s, were able to drink. Jacob told her who he was, Rachel went to tell her father, and Laban went to meet Jacob, and invited him to stay with the family.

**Talk about:** how much easier it is to get water today, in our houses – but how sheep in this country get enough water to drink (talk about streams, water troughs, springs, wells). Do we think about how our water is provided at all?

**2 Jacob’s marriage and Laban’s trickery – make masks**

There are two types of mask you could make, depending on what you have available in terms of materials: paper plate masks, or a carnival-type mask made of card (see the picture). You could cut out the carnival-type mask from a paper plate, if you wanted.

**For either mask you will need:** scissors, elastic or ribbon to fasten the mask on, colouring pencils or felt tip pens. You might need an adult to help you cut out the eye holes.

**For the paper plate mask you will need:** a paper plate. If you want to add hair, some wool or string, and some glue.

**For the carnival-type mask you will need:** card or a paper plate to cut up

Whatever the type of mask you make, you will need to make eye holes. With the paper plate, the eye holes should be about half way down the plate, and close enough together for you to see through them. With the carnival-type mask, make sure you make the eye holes the right distance apart for your eyes, and that you have shaped the lower edge sufficiently to go round your nose! Decorate your mask, remembering that the point of a mask is to make your face difficult to recognise.

Attach elastic to the sides of the mask, long enough to go round your head. If you are using ribbons, you need enough to tie at the back of your head.

Jacob was in love with Rachel, and wanted to marry her. He was working for Laban, but he wasn’t being paid. Laban and Jacob agreed that he would work for Laban for no money for 7 years, and then he would marry Rachel. 7 years later, Laban organised the wedding – but when they went to bed, in the dark, on the wedding night, Laban sent his older daughter, Leah, to Jacob. When Jacob saw, in the morning, that he had slept with Leah, and not Rachel, he was very angry.

He went to Laban and asked why Laban had cheated him – he had worked for Rachel, not for Leah. Laban said that it was not customary to allow the younger daughter to marry before the elder, but that if Jacob liked, he could have Rachel as well, and work another 7 years for her! So a week later, after the full wedding celebrations for Leah, they had another wedding, this time for Rachel, and then Jacob worked another 7 years.

Laban gave each of his daughters a servant girl when they got married. All four women had children with Jacob – see the separate list.

**Talk about:** being cheated – has anyone ever told you that they would do something for you and then they haven’t, or they have done something that you didn’t want to happen? If this has never happened to you, imagine it has, and how you would feel about it.

**3 Jacob’s children – make tube people**

**You will need:** inner tubes from kitchen towel rolls, or similar. You might want to have them in different sizes, if you are going to make more than one. Crepe or tissue paper in different colours, or fabric scraps, for clothes, crayons or felt tip pens to draw faces, pipe-cleaners for arms (optional)

Draw a face at the top of the tube, and then wrap the coloured paper or fabric scraps around the lower part of the tube for clothing. If you are feeling really clever, you can make a hole on each side of the body, below the face, and thread a pipe-cleaner through, to make arms, and then make sleeves in the clothing.

The bible tells us what order Jacob’s children were born in, and who their mothers were. There is a separate sheet which lists them in order. By the time Jacob left Haran, where Leah and Rachel had grown up, there were twelve children – 11 sons and a daughter. The 12th son, Benjamin, was not born until the whole family was back in Palestine, so he was much younger than the others.

**Talk about:** being part of a large family. If you are part of a small family, imagine what it would be like to have lots of brothers or sisters – would you argue, or would you be friends? Would you like the same things? Would you be close friends with just some of them?

**4 Jacob’s sheep and Laban’s trickery – make striped sticks**

**You will need:** a sheet of paper, very thin paint (any colour, but brown would be good) and a paintbrush or piece of sponge, a pencil, light coloured wax crayons, or a white wax candle

On your sheet of paper, draw sticks, with gaps between them. Make stripes on your sticks with the candle or crayons. (you won’t be able to see exactly where the candle wax is – this is the fun of this activity. Paint the thin paint over the sticks, never mind trying not to go over the wax – the paint won’t stick to the wax anyway.

After Jacob had worked 7 years for Rachel, he and Laban had another discussion about what Jacob should be paid. This time, they decided that Jacob, who looked after Laban’s sheep and goats, should take out of the herds all the speckled and striped, or brown animals, leaving Laban with the white animals, so they would be able to tell the difference always in the future. Laban agreed, but cheated from the beginning – before Jacob could sort out the herds, Laban sent his sons to remove all the speckled and striped and brown animals, and take them well away from where Jacob had the rest. So there was Jacob, with the sheep and goats which belonged to Laban, not the ones he had expected to have for himself. Jacob got some small branches of almond, plane and poplar trees, and partly peeled the branches, so that they were striped. He put the striped branches in the water troughs where the animals came to drink and mate, and the animals had striped and speckled and brown young. The end result was that, because God was with Jacob, Jacob had more animals, and better animals in his herds than Laban had in his. It didn’t matter how many times Laban changed the rules (and he did it a lot!), Jacob always did better than Laban.

**Talk about:** cheating and being cheated. If this went on for a long time – and for Jacob this has been going on for 20 years – how would you feel?

**5 Jacob leaves home: packing for a journey**

**You will need:** a piece of A4 paper, pencil or pen to write with

If you didn’t do this activity when we talked about Jacob leaving home for Haran, Laban’s home, you could do it now. But this time, imagine you are going on holiday with your whole family – Jacob was taking two wives, at least two house servants, 12 children (11 sons and 1 daughter), and all his animals and the people to look after them!. Write a list of the things you need to take – you might want to include food for the beginning of the journey, if you are starting out in the morning.

Jacob was beginning to be scared of Laban. Laban’s sons were angry that Jacob always won, no matter how their father changed the rules. Laban was no longer friendly, for the same reason – and because people who cheat and lose don’t like the people they have cheated. Jacob decided that he should leave Haran, and go back to Palestine, where his own family was.

He talked to Rachel and Leah, and they agreed that their father was treating all of them badly, so they all packed up – wives, children (12 of them, 11 sons and a daughter), herds, servants – and left. It took three days for Laban to notice that Jacob and family were no longer around, because he was with his own flocks, shearing the sheep, by which time Jacob was well on his way. When he discovered Jacob had gone, it took him a week to catch up. The night before he did catch up, God came to Laban in a dream and warned him not to threaten Jacob. Jacob didn’t know that Rachel had stolen her father’s household “gods”.

When Laban found Jacob, he was angry. He insisted on searching all Jacob’s possessions, but he found nothing (Rachel was sitting on what she had stolen, and refused to move). Jacob was frightened of Laban’s anger, and he didn’t know there was anything to find. He let Laban search, and when Laban found nothing, Jacob lost his temper. He told Laban how he felt about how he had been treated and cheated, and Laban realised that he had lost again, his daughters and his grandchildren were never going to come back. He and Jacob and their servants and families built a pile of rocks, and made an agreement that each of them would never go past the pile to attack the other, and the next morning, each group set out again in opposite directions.

**Talk about:** how to solve an argument without fighting. Think about what sort of agreement you might make, and how you might plan to keep any promises you make. Jacob and Laban made a sort of boundary between them, but what else could you do to remind yourself of what you have agreed?

**6 Jacob’s plan for meeting Esau**

If you remember from the first part of Jacob’s story, 2 months ago, when Jacob left home, he did so because he had made Esau so angry that he threatened to kill Jacob. Now, 20 years later, Jacob has not forgotten that anger. So he made a plan to persuade Esau to forgive him.

As he got closer to Edom, where Esau lived, he sent messengers to find Esau, and to tell him that Jacob, now rich, is on his way home, and looks forward to meeting him again. When the servants came back to Jacob, they told him that Esau was already on his way to meet Jacob, with 400 men. This Jacob found frightening. He split the whole of his party – animals and people – into two groups, hoping that if Esau attacked one group, the other would escape. Then he prayed to God for protection from his brother. The next morning, he sent Esau a present – a selection of the best of his animals – sheep and goats, camels and cows and donkeys. He sent each group separately, with servants, who were told to tell Esau that each group was a present from Jacob to Esau, and that Jacob would be coming behind them. He hoped that Esau would be pleased with the gifts, and would forgive him his behaviour in the past.

It was another day before they met – the story of the night in between is below, in section 7.

It turned out that Esau had already forgiven Jacob – they met with hugs, and with Esau expressing surprise about the family and the animal wealth Jacob had acquired. He said he didn’t need the presents, but Jacob insisted he take them. Jacob was untrusting – perhaps not surprisingly, bearing in mind what he had done to Esau before, and what he had learnt from Laban over 20 years, and would not settle down to live near Esau.

**Talk about:** how you can apologise for something you have done that hurts someone else. How you can forgive yourself, and not go on feeling guilty.

**7 Jacob meets God**

After Jacob had sent away the groups of animals for Esau, he sent his family over the river they had camped beside, but he stayed in the camp by himself. During the night, a man came and wrestled with Jacob, in the dark, until just before dawn. When the man discovered that Jacob would not let him win, he dislocated Jacob’s hip, but Jacob still held onto him. He wanted Jacob to let go of him, but Jacob said he would not, unless the man blessed him. The man asked Jacob’s name, and when he told it, the man said that he would no longer be called Jacob, but would be called “Israel” instead, which means “he struggles with God”, because he, Jacob, had struggled with God and with men, and won. Then he blessed Jacob and went away. Jacob said “I have seen God face to face, and I am still alive”, and he limped across the river to meet Esau.

**Celebration**

We’ll start our celebration by singing “Our God is a great big God” <https://youtu.be/8Hi8jW1qYsw>

One thing that Jacob had to learn was that God is a great big God. He’s not limited to one place and you can’t run away from him. Do you remember what we talked about two months ago when we first talked about Jacob? That’s right, he was running away from his brother, Esau, and the first night, when he laid down to sleep, he dreamt about a great big ladder with angels on it. This month we are taking the story on, and looking at what happened when he got to his uncle’s house, and what happened much later when he came home.

Jacob travelled on from the place where he had had his dream. He travelled for many days, until he got neat to where his uncle Laban lived. Just before he got to his house, Jacob came to a well. There were some shepherds at the well, with their sheep. The well was where they got water for the sheep, but the shepherds waited till all the flocks were there, because it was hard work to move the stone that covered the well. Jacob asked the shepherds if they knew his uncle. “Yes” they said, “and this is his daughter coming now.” Rachel was a shepherd, and she had brought her flock to be watered. When he saw her, Jacob moved the stone, and helped her water her flock. Let’s make a model well out of cardboard.

As soon as Laban heard that Jacob was around, he rushed to meet him and invited him to stay. Now remember what we said about Jacob being a trickster? Well, Laban was worse. We’ll see how in a minute.

After Jacob had been there a month, Laban said that he should pay him for the work he did. Now Jacob had fallen for Rachel, and he said, “I’ll work for you for 7 years, if you let me marry Rachel.” “OK!” said Laban. So Jacob worked for Laban for 7 years, and at the end of it there was a wedding. But the morning after the wedding Jacob discovered that instead of Rachel he’d been married to her older sister, Leah! No, I don’t know how he didn’t realise earlier, either. Perhaps Leah wore a veil, or was disguised some other way. We’ll make masks as a disguise, so we can remember that bit of the story.

We’ll sing “Uptimes, down times” <https://youtu.be/gZY1ik1OZEM>

Jacob was always having up-times and down-times. Here he was married to the wrong daughter. However, in those days it was allowed for a man to have more than one wife. So, after complaining, Jacob said he would work for another 7 years and marry Rachel as well. (This was the cause of later problems with his children, but more of that another time. Leah could have children, but for a long time, Rachel couldn’t.) This time, though, he wanted the wedding before the work. After the second 7 years, Jacob decided to leave, but Laban wanted him to stay. They agreed on a new wage. Jacob was to get all the spotted or speckled sheep. (Some people keep a breed of sheep known as “Jacob’s Sheep” which are spotted or speckled even today.) Jacob put sticks in front of the watering troughs, because he believed this would make the sheep have speckled lambs. It shouldn’t have worked, but it did. Jacob gradually had more and more sheep. Laban tried changing the payment, but no matter what it was, more lambs ended up in Jacob’s flock than Laban’s.

We’ll draw a picture of sticks that Jacob might have used.

Laban’s sons thought their father had been cheated. When Jacob heard this, he knew it was time to leave, so he gathered up his wives, his children and his flocks, and headed back to where he came from.

Let’s sing “One more step along the world I go” <https://youtu.be/7PXV3dwaeNU>

When Jacob got closer to home he started to send his wives, children and servants ahead, with gifts for Esau. When he was alone, the Bible tells us that he wrestled with a man all night. This was really God he was struggling with. After that time, Jacob started to be known as Israel.

We’ll say a prayer.

Dear God, sometimes we seem to be fighting with you as we struggle to understand what you want us to be and do. Help us to keep hold of you in our lives.

Amen.

Next Messy Church is 17th July. We can’t be with you in person then, so we won’t be able to do Zoom, but we will put a celebration on YouTube for you to follow, and prepare a booklet of activities. See you then.

Enjoy our celebration on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw>

Then have tea or a treat if it isn’t tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don’t want shared, just tell me. I’ll only share the one’s you’re happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

We now manage the YouTube channel, and Zoom for talk back to us. Our end of Zoom will be what is going on YouTube, but we won’t put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. We live stream at 4pm, but it then stays up as a recording. Like last time we will mix activities into the story.