

50 DAYS

WEEK 2: Holy Humor Sunday, Rebekah and Jacob

By Carol Duerksen

DAY 1

HOLY HUMOR SUNDAY

“BRAY WITH ME”

Note: Families can read this together, and there can be more than one Detective. Just divide it up as needed.

Preparation:

- Listen to several donkeys braying on YouTube. Practice braying like a donkey. The person who does the best donkey bray gets the part.
- Find Bryan Moyer Suderman on YouTube and his song “Detectives of Divinity.” You can also find another version of it on Facebook, SmallTallMinistries, the Good Friday singalong time. Listen just to the Detectives song for now. You can catch him later on Facebook for more singing.

Detective: I’m a Detective of Divinity, which means I look for God’s actions in my life and in the world.

OPTION: Go to Facebook and watch Bryan Moyer Suderman from SmallTallMinistries, the Good Friday singalong time; or watch just the Detectives song from YouTube.

Donkey brays

Detective looks at donkey: Excuse me?

Donkey brays again

Detective: I wish I could understand you.

Donkey: Well, now that you ask. What do you want to know?

Detective: Whoa! You can talk?

Donkey: Of course. When I want to.

Detective: Cool! So, what's new with you?

Donkey brays, dances in a circle, runs and bucks.

Detective: Are you really happy?

Donkey brays

Detective: English please?

Donkey: Yes!!! Can't you see? YES!!

Detective: And why are you so happy?

Donkey: If you'd been where I've been, and seen what I've seen, you'd be dancing too!

Detective: Now you've got me curious. Tell me more!

Donkey brays

Detective: English please!

Donkey: Not so long ago....I don't remember which day....I was just hanging out with my mom. Then these guys show up. They look me over, and the next thing I know, they put a rope around my neck and start taking me away.

Detective: Why?

Donkey: That's what I wanted to know. So I stopped in my tracks.

Detective: And then?

Donkey: I stood there. Not moving. Don't wanna leave mom. Don't wanna go away with strangers. Not going.

Detective: I've heard the phrase "Stubborn as a donkey."

Donkey brays.

Detective: Well, you aren't still standing there. What happened?

Donkey: I heard the guys talking. One said "How are we going to tell Jesus the donkey he wanted won't come?" I had heard about this Jesus. A very nice man. People follow him

around. He's very different...in a wonderful way. If this Jesus wanted me. . .well. . .I changed my mind. So I followed them.

Detective: And they took you to Jesus?

Donkey: Yep. And you know what he wanted? He wanted to ride me into Jerusalem.

Detective: Had you been ridden before?

Donkey: Nope. Never.

Detective: Why would Jesus want to ride a donkey that wasn't broke to ride? Seems a little risky to me. No offense, of course.

Donkey: Look, if I'm going to leave my mom behind and follow two strangers because I've heard good things about this guy Jesus, do you think I would do something stupid when he gets on me to go for a ride? Donkeys are not stupid. In fact, we are known to be smarter than horses. Just sayin'. DONKEY BRAYS.

Detective: Okay. Okay! So how did the ride go?

Donkey: Interesting. I've never been to Jerusalem before. Lots of people. Noisy. Some of the people seemed really happy to see us. Some of them threw palm branches and even their coats on the ground for me to walk on. That was strange. It made me really wonder about this man Jesus that was on my back.

Detective: What happened when you got to Jerusalem?

Donkey: When they got done with me, they left me to find my way home, which wasn't a problem at all.

Detective: I guess you heard about what happened to Jesus.

Donkey: I was there.

Detective: You were?

Donkey: Yep. I heard something was going on in Jerusalem, so I ran into town. I saw the three crosses up on the hill from a distance already. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe Jesus was on one of them. I just stood there and cried.

DONKEY BRAYS SADLY

Donkey: But that wasn't the end! Three days later, people saw Jesus again! I saw him! He was alive!!! God had raised him from the dead!

Donkey brays, dances in a circle, runs and bucks.

Detective: God played a joke on death!!! Death doesn't win anymore! This is reason to celebrate and laugh and dance and laugh some more!

Donkey: So BRAY WITH ME!

Donkey and Detective bray and bray and bray!

SONG: “Lord of the Dance” Lyric video on YouTube.

DAY 2

If I Had a Camel

We don’t have a camel. Our farm has at least one of many different critters, but we don’t have a camel. Ah, but if we did. . .

If we had a camel, I would invite children to come see, smell and hear this unusual creature. If the camel didn’t cooperate and talk to us, we’d be sure to play camel sounds from the internet. We would talk about how far they can go on a gallon of water, and how much water they can drink at one time. We’d invite the children to discover how much water a camel, or a group of camels, can drink. And sure enough, we’d talk about Rebekah—that amazing young woman in the Bible story who impressed a man traveling with camels with her kind heart, strong arms, beautiful face, and deep courage. We’d ask “Would you leave your home to move to a new country? Would you listen for what God says in your heart?”

If we had a camel, I would invite youth groups to come see, smell, and hear this unusual creature. If they needed to use their phones to experience camel sounds, we’d do that. Maybe we’d have a contest to see which team can fill their water tank the fastest. Camels drink a lot of water, you know. And what if the only person to water these camels, one jar at a time, was a young woman? And what if that feat was part of the process that earned her the invitation to leave her home and family with a stranger to go marry someone else in a foreign land? We’d ask “Would you do what Rebekah did, and why or why not?” We’d explore questions like “What are ways you detect God might be moving in your life?”

If we had a camel, I would invite adult faith formation groups to come witness this unusual creature. Maybe we’d listen to the sounds camels make, and maybe we’d carry water. But maybe we’d just sit downwind so we can get the full smell effect, and we’d have a discussion about the young woman whose camel watering abilities led her to a husband. We would ask questions like “When have you trusted the inner voice of God, like Rebekah did, and stepped out into the unknown?” Or “In what area of your life might you be hearing the words, like Rebekah did, ‘You go!’?”

Ah, if I only had a camel.

“But Carol,” my crafty friend says. “You have one with you all the time.” And she promptly shows me how to trace around my open hand, flip the page upside down, and there, with a face added to the thumb and a tail tacked onto the pinkie, is a camel.

Don't you just love faith formation? Don't you love how creativity and everyday life and Bible stories all come together in the melting pot of the Spirit, and what comes out is a new way to think, see, experience and love God and each other? Don't you just love how the people in the Bible were so much like us, and that even though we don't water camels or ride one to a foreign land to meet our life partner, we deal with the same issues of trust and faith in God? Don't you just love discovering new ways to think about old stories?

I do.

SONG: “Guide me O thou great Jehovah” Hymnal Worship Book #582. Or a YouTube version!

DAY 3

True confession: the pandemic has given my husband and me time to watch Netflix, something we never did together before. We've been through Tiger King, an episode of Longmire, and yesterday watched the first part of One of Us.

It would be so much fun to write the Genesis 24 story for Netflix.

It's all there! Hopeful bachelor. Concerned parents. Loyal servant. Smelly camels. Beautiful virgin. Big decision. Supportive parents. Faithful God.

Our story begins with a promise partially fulfilled. God promised the old childless couple, Abraham and Sarah, that they would have a baby, and that their offspring would be “as numerous as the stars of heaven.” (Genesis 15:5) The baby, Isaac, arrives and grows up. Now he needs a wife.

Abraham calls his trusted servant and sends him on a mission: Find Isaac a proper wife. Don't go next door to the neighbors. Go back to Abraham's homeland and look among his relatives. (Sounds strange to us but it was the custom in those days.)

The servant assembles his traveling entourage of ten camels, and heads out of tent city. We don't know how long it takes, but at some point he gets to the town where Abraham's brother lives and he sits down by the city well. He and his camels are thirsty.

At this point, the servant prays, saying “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. And if I can get some help watering these camels, that would be cool too.”

Help is on the way.

But before we go there, let's stop and talk.

PRE-SCHOOL AND CHILDREN:

Write the words "Help me God" on one side of a piece of paper. (Assist pre-school as needed, and explain what the words mean.) On the other side, draw a picture of something with which you would like God's help. Pray together about this request.

YOUTH AND ADULTS:

One interesting thing about this story is that the only mention of an actual prayer is when the servant gets to the well. We don't read that Abraham or Sarah or Isaac prayed about this, or that Rebekah was praying for a husband. They might have been, but the story doesn't say that. In his commentary on Genesis, Walter Brueggemann says that this story is an example of people who trusted that God was present and working in their lives, and that things were working out as they should. Abraham did what was customary—he sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac—and he trusted God that it would work out. Sometimes it isn't until we have hindsight that we see how God worked in and through our circumstances.

Consider the following questions, and if you want to, create colored sand art jars with the questions. You will need an empty mason jar, a funnel, and several different colors of sand (up to 7 layers,) and a candle. As you pour each layer, reflect on:

Layer 1: A time when your prayers were answered.

Layer 2: A time when your prayers were not answered as you had hoped.

Layer 3: A time when someone prayed for you.

Layer 4: A time when you prayed for someone.

Layer 5: A time when your prayers weren't answered as you hoped but God still worked for good in the situation.

Layer 6: A time when you can look back and notice God's presence and guidance in hindsight.

Layer 7: A time when your prayer was answered in a way that was better than you had hoped.

Put the candle in the jar, light it, and praise God for the light of God's never-ending faithfulness!

SONG: "Great is thy faithfulness" HWB #327, or YouTube! :

DAY 4

Help is on the way.

Rebekah was surely at that well every day, because it was the custom for women to draw water for the families and the family's livestock. The difference this day is that a stranger was sitting there—a stranger who asked her for a drink. A stranger with a whole bunch of smelly thirsty camels.

Rebekah smiled with her eyes and with her heart, and the servant was completely taken by what he saw and felt. It sure looked like this young woman was the answer to his prayer. And then, when he asked about her family, she named Abraham's kin. SCORE!!!

But the deal wasn't sealed.

Let's take a break to water camels and talk.

PRE-SCHOOL AND CHILDREN:

1. Water the Camels:

Use a stick horse to represent a camel. Ride through the dusty desert to the well (a large bucket). Draw water from the well with a rope tied to a coffee mug, and dump it into a bucket for the camel. Rebekah had to water ten camels, so ride ten camels to the well and water them.

2. Camel Sounds:

Find camel sounds on YouTube and have a contest to see who can imitate them the best!

YOUTH AND ADULTS:

1. How much do you think God is actively involved in your life, and how much "just happens" and God is a part of the big picture? For example, do you attribute weather conditions to God? Do you thank God when someone is in an accident but is okay? (And what if another person in the accident died?)
2. When has someone "smiled with their eyes and heart" at you? When have you smiled like that to someone?
3. When has someone gone out of their way to help you, like "watered your ten thirsty camels." When have you watered someone else's camels?

SONG: "O Master let me walk with thee" HWB #357, or YouTube

DAY 5

But the deal wasn't sealed.

Rebekah invited the servant to their home. There, with her family listening intently, he recounted the story of why he was there, how he prayed, and how Rebekah seems to be the woman he is looking for. The pieces are all fitting together!

But the deal wasn't sealed.

The servant was eager to get back on the road—he couldn't wait to show Abraham and Isaac how successful the journey had been. But Rebekah's family wasn't so thrilled about her immediate departure—they wanted a few days to help her pack and to process this goodbye. Rebekah was a loved family member, not just a "successful product" of a journey. The servant pushed back. He wanted to leave. . .now!

Rebekah's family put the decision in her lap.

She decided she would go right away. The deal was sealed.

Let's stop to talk and play a game:

PRE-SCHOOL AND CHILDREN:

"Would you?" Game

Give each child two items, a green one that represents YES and a red one that represents NO. It can be flags, colored sticks, whatever. They answer the question by raising the YES or NO item. Feel free to add to or change the questions based on your child(ren).

1. Would you leave your home and move to another country?
2. Would you ride a camel?
3. Would you drink water from a well?
4. Would you walk 50 miles? (Or name two cities that your child knows that are far apart)
5. Would you ask your family before leaving with someone you didn't know?
6. Would you pray for success on a mission?
7. Would you sleep in a tent in the desert?
8. Would you watch while somebody else does all the work?

9. Would you do all the work while somebody else watches?
10. Would you know if God talked to your heart?

YOUTH AND ADULTS

1. Answer the same questions posed for the children.
2. Many women in Rebekah's era did not have many choices, but Rebekah was given a choice of whether to go back with Abraham's servant and become Isaac's wife. She talked with her family, pondered the pros and cons, and said yes. We don't know what would have happened if she'd said no and decided to stay home in the comfort of her family and community. We can only see the results of her decision to trust God's providence.
3. In what area of your life might you be hearing these words "You go!"

SONG: "Here I am, Lord." HWB # 395. Some beautiful versions on YouTube!

DAY 6

Rebekah left everything that was familiar to her to go to another community to marry a man she had never met.

One evening, while Isaac was out walking in his field, he saw camels approaching. He saw the camels, and about the same time, Rebekah saw him in the field. Finding out from the servant that it was indeed Isaac, her husband-to-be, Rebekah slipped off of the camel and covered herself with a veil, as was customary.

The servant told Isaac the whole amazing story.

Isaac and Rebekah were married, and they all lived happily ever after.

Well, actually, they had some issues. That would be another set of episodes in our Netflix show.

ALL AGES:

Search for "camel handprints" on the internet, and make one with your hand. You can use paint, or it can be as simple as tracing your palm on a piece of paper, turning it upside down, and adding a tail to the little finger and a longer neck and face to the thumb.

Write the following prayer on the page: God help us to serve others and to trust you like Rebekah did. Amen!

SONG: "Will you let me be your servant?" HWB #307. Or YouTube.

DAY 7

A NEW NORMAL FOR JACOB, AND FOR US

By Karen Ediger

Rebekah returned with Abraham's servant to marry Isaac. Rebekah gave birth to twins, Esau, born first, and Jacob. Because Esau was born first, he should have received the birthright from their father, including a special blessing and an extra portion of inheritance. But Jacob, with Rebekah's help, was able to trick their father into giving it to him instead.

In this story, found in Genesis 28:10-22, Jacob, having just stolen Esau's birthright, escapes Esau's wrath by traveling to his Uncle Laban's (Rebekah's brother's) place. The first night on his travels, he looks for a good place to sleep. He finds a flat rock on which to lay his head and goes to sleep. During the night, he dreams. From the rock on which his head rests, a ladder rises up to Heaven. Angels are going up and down the ladder and God is standing beside Jacob. God tells him:

"I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring;¹⁴ and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring.¹⁵ Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Genesis 28:13-15

When Jacob wakes up, he realizes this place, this rock, is the entrance to a portal leading straight to God in Heaven. This is the place from which God sends the angels out with their messages. He takes the rock, places it upright, and names the spot "Beth-el" or House of God.

In response to God's promise that Jacob is still part of the promise made to his grandfather, Abraham, Jacob also makes a promise:

"If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear,²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God,²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you." Genesis 28:20-22

Read the promise that Jacob made again. Can you see his fear? What is there that resonates with what we as a people are experiencing during the COVID-19 health crisis? Like many people today, Jacob is worried about having food to eat and clothing to wear, the necessities of life. He is worried about the new normal he will experience at his Uncle's place and wants to be able to go back to his father's house in peace, to how things used to be.

Jacob, being Jacob, tries to bargain with God. He says IF God will provide for him, he will make a physical recognition of God for all to see, a House of God. He doesn't ask for wealth from which to give one-tenth. He's promising to give one-tenth of whatever he receives.

In the meantime, Jacob will have a new normal at his uncle's place. And we are experiencing a new normal also. The world is going through a crisis that will change us. We're not sure that things will ever be normal again. And like Jacob, we know that God will be present with us in this new normal.

Jacob doesn't mention gratitude, but I think that is what his promised actions express. I have found that during some of the most challenging times of my life, it was helpful to remember the things for which I was grateful. During this time, we can express our gratitude to those who are helping us to obtain what we need, some at risk to their own health. We can keep a gratitude journal to help us focus on what we have rather than what we may lose. And to the extent that we are able to do so, we can help others.

SONG: "Because He lives" HWB #345 Great options on YouTube!