

[Genesis 29:15-28](#)

[Psalm 105:1-11, 45b](#)

[Matthew 13:31-33,44-52](#)

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

*Jesus,
steady one,
How you lived your life,
With those burdens and beliefs,
We do not know.
But we know this:
You kept your heart steady,
And were distracted neither by fame nor fury.
May we keep steady,
Pursuing that which will help us,
Not harm us;
What will dignify us,
Not destroy us.
Because you did this,
And in you,
We see a life lived
With the deepest love.
Amen.¹*

“Hold Steady”

Do you remember when this was last said to you?

I remember these words being said as splinters were being taken out of my finger.

I remember these words being said when a dress was being hemmed.

I say these words each time I am on the highway and find myself with large trucks on both sides of me.

Hold Steady.....and the splinter will be removed, the pins on the hem will be in place, you will get through this narrow space and all will be well.

Hold Steady, be faithful,
keep going forward, breathe and we will get through this together.

So friends, let's steadily plunge into our readings today.
As we continue the story of Abraham and Sarah's descendants, today we have a love story gone a bit awry.

This story brings up so many cultural differences that we must talk about.
First, culturally the women had no say in this marriage.
Thankfully, in our culture things have changed.
Second, to work as a farmhand to earn the right to marry a daughter.
Again, thankfully, dowries are no longer required, and women are not seen as property in this way.
Third, Jacob the trickster has met his match with his Uncle Laban. Jacob, for once, is tricked!

I do feel like that with some simple pre-marital counseling, safe church practices, and better communication, some of this story could have been avoided.

I feel for Leah who knows that she was never the first love of Jacob, even as she is the one who is steadfast and faithful through and through.
I wonder how she felt being a pawn in her father's plan.

There are so many things in this story that we can wonder about....
And they deserve some of our attention and we can reflect also on the steadfastness of love.

Jacob's love keeps him honoring his commitment to both Laban, to Leah, and to Rachel.
Love makes him steadfast, carries him through and keeps him faithful to his commitments. (Perhaps, he also checked the vail when it came to marrying Rachel, too!)

Hold steady, do the work, and seek dignity not fame nor fury.
Jacob, Leah, Rachel, let love motivate your daily life, your daily space,
Grow in love and relationship....
Hold steady, the pain of rejection will pass,
the adjustments to the space will be made, and this uncomfortable space will pass.

I am not sure that life was ever easy in Jacob's household.
Remember, Leah's boys and Rachel's first born, Joseph, do not get along.
Remembering how the marriages all began, you can't blame them.

We have come a long way from this story. Hold Steady... Yesterday, July 29th, was the 49th anniversary of women's ordination in the Episcopal Church, Barbara C. Harris – the first woman ordained bishop was an acolyte at the service in Philadelphia. And while there is still work to be done for equality and all voices to be heard and represented in the church, we hold steady, faithful in love and working for the kingdom of heaven.² During my own ordination, I could feel the weight of those hands placed on my head- praying to hold steady to respond to the call of love in my life and to share that in this calling each and every day.

During the liturgical season of Ordinary time (the time between Pentecost -way back in May, 50days after Easter- and Advent-which begins 4 Sundays before Christmas Day) we have two different scriptural threads going on.

We have the personal histories of the families of the Old Testament and we have settled into the parables of Matthew.

Parables told from the son of a carpenter, usually about farming, while standing on a boat or by the water and concluding with a fiery hell and the gnashing of teeth.

Today is no exception.

We hear of a mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, the flawless pearl, casting a net into the sea, and the master of the household.

Jesus, the consummate teacher is inviting his listeners to keep wondering about the Kingdom of heaven.

Each parable, even as short as they are, tells that the Kingdom of heaven can be found right here and now and demands our engagement.

Like a mustard seed, a weed that is undesirable and yet can become so much more. A life of steadfast faith encompasses all things and endures even through the weeds.

Like the small amount of yeast that can transform the largest amount of flour with time and patience. Steadfast love has the power to change all that it is around.

Like hidden treasure and the perfect pearl that, when found, inspires you to abandon everything to secure that piece of perfection. Love motivates and moves you.

Like a net that pulls up all the fish, even then there is work that must be done by all of us.

The kingdom of heaven is steadfastly revealing itself in the old and the new as needed in each situation.

Jesus steadfastly lives and tells of the kingdom of God. A space that is “on heaven as on earth” as we pray in the Lord’s prayer requires all of us to be part of the story regardless of what befalls us.

All of our readings today point us towards the mysterious and astonishing love of God. Every time we think we can fully describe God’s love and kingdom, the lives we live demand that we should keep holding steady to learning this vocabulary of steadfast love again and again.

The men and women in our lives who have shown us what steadfastness looks like, model the gift of taking one steady step at a time, in love, not for fame nor fury but for the love of God that has lit a spark in their loves and inspired them to do the same.

The Traditions of enduring steady love set the example for us to unravel how God is still engaged in our current lives.

Steadfast, faithful.

Hold Steady friends.
In this midst of this heat.
In the midst of rejection
In the midst of challenging times.
Seek the pearl.
Seek the hidden treasure
Keep casting the net

Because the kingdom of God is in our midst, inviting us to find it, to seek it out and to know this love, steadfast love of God.

Hold Steady.
Keep breathing.
See the path ahead.
Live a life with the deepest love.

And as our closing hymn sings, “Grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the living of these days, for the living of these days”³

¹ <https://www.spiritualityofconflict.com/readings/263/eighth-sunday-after-pentecost> As you can tell, this is one of my favorite resources for prayers and direction. This project opens up scripture in a whole new way!

² Lots of history to tell! <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2023/07/28/church-prepares-to-mark-49th-anniversary-of-womens-ordination-to-the-priesthood/> <https://www.episcopalarchives.org/house-of-deputies/women/ordination> and here This Movie tells the story! https://vimeo.com/797111253?fbclid=IwAR0v3xYnG_LhAX_i5DpZebhjl7VLxvISkx08Xc1nton7_vUeQgUe3AWM0_4

³ Our closing hymn is one of my favorites, a chorus that stick with you! https://hymnary.org/text/god_of_grace_and_god_of_glor