

I was surprised to discover a new wireless network on School Street the other day. In addition to our very own Edgerton House and various Dartmouth networks there is now a wireless network in one of the neighboring residences. All I know about this network is its name, 'Hot Girls'. Because of the location of buildings on school street, the 'Hot Girls' network is probably located in one of three buildings: the funeral parlor, a fraternity house or an all-women student residence. I have no idea where it is, but it did pique my curiosity. Are the girls hot because of the seasonably warm temperatures? Or is the network name the construct of a frustrated male gaze? Or maybe the wireless nomenclature is an ironic post-feminist commentary? It seems to me that there are multiple possible readings of the network. All that I know is that it is encrypted, and I'm not rushing to knock on doors to solve the mystery.

You may think it deeply inappropriate of the owners of the network on School Street to have such an unusual name. But in comparison to our first reading from the story of Jacob it is absolutely nothing. We listened in reverent silence to a story about polygamy and adultery. And while you might think that God would have something to say about both of those vices, in each case Jacob's promiscuity is either divinely sanctioned or tacitly endorsed. It's actually a quite shocking text for us today. Familiar as we are with the long established tradition of monogamy, it comes as something of surprise to read that in addition to having two wives Jacob is encouraged into having extra-marital affairs to provide Yahweh's blessing of children.

Jacob's behavior is not just immoral by today's standards: it is also illegal. And yet according to the text Jacob's many different relations with women do not come in for criticism. Instead it is Laban, Jacob's uncle, who is later criticized for not remunerating Jacob properly. For us it is jarring to remember that Jacob was given the hands in marriage

of both Leah and Rachel as payment. And even though the story starts with Jacob's attraction to the beautiful Rachel, the story is less a love story, than another biblical story about the just and equitable distribution of resources. Once we realize that for the writer people are an economic reality it suddenly all makes sense. For in this particular case, the gift of children, like the gift of cattle and sheep and goats, is a gift that Yahweh is keen to distribute as widely as possible.

While the quest for economic equality might sound familiar to us, there is no doubting just how alien to us the social arrangements of Jacob and Laban's households were.

I think it is important to be reminded of these alien dimensions to the biblical text. Too much of the time we take what we like from the bible while forgetting that it is fundamentally an alien set of documents. While we share a religious heritage with the biblical writers, we really have very little in common with a Jacob or a Laban.

When it comes to the figure of Jesus we are tempted to imagine that the alien world of the scriptures has by then become more familiar. But here again we would be wrong. Although many of the stories in the New Testament are well known to us, they are also stories written from within a fundamentally different imaginative universe.

One of the most important differences between our world and the ancient worlds is as we have seen the status of gender and questions of human sexuality. But this is simply one symptom of a much larger set of interpretative and symbolic differences.

Today we live in a world of quantification, verification and labyrinthine classification systems. We love to imagine that everything can be explained and that given enough time we will be able to order everything about our world and our lives. Where anything threatens

this desire for order we act as if something were wrong, and look around for someone to blame. While the ancients responded to calamities by sacrificing to one of a number of gods, today our instincts are to sue for legal redress.

Strangely enough despite enormous differences between the biblical world and our world there are points of convergence. Like the people of biblical times, we are people living in deeply unsettling, dangerous and confusing times. We may not have been kicked out of our homes or sent packing by foreign invaders, but hundreds of thousands have lost their homes or are facing terrible choices between losing their home, heating their home or paying for medical expenses. And that is before we even think about the terrible choices facing the majority of our world's population who live in poverty.

Despite our wireless networks and our cell phones, underneath all our sophistication and technological prowess, we are still fundamentally human. And as human beings we prefer certainty to uncertainty. We prefer knowing how we will pay for heat through the next winter to not knowing. While the ancients had to trust in a decent crop yield, culturally our trust is in a decent return on the stock market and a swift reduction in high fuel and food prices. Either way, when living in deeply uncertain times, it is only natural to crave stability.

The astonishing thing about Jesus is that *despite* that natural human desire for certainty, he will have none of it. Time after time, Jesus chooses metaphors that draw the kingdom of God into dialogue with the ebb and flow of economics. Instead of choosing a nice solid and trustworthy metaphor like a fortress or a rock, we get instead a whole series of stories in which the kingdom is highly prized, elusive, difficult to attain, and ultimately a mixed blessing. I can't help thinking that the price of oil or the DOW Jones Industrial Average would actually make quite wonderful contemporary translations of kingdom. While it will

probably strike you as odd to think of the kingdom as a volatile commodity or a financial market, think about it a little. When Jesus was comparing the kingdom to pearls, fish, grain and agricultural labor, he was making the point that the kingdom is found in things that are both ephemeral but also economically essential.

Both the story of Jacob and the stories of Jesus are comfortable with a vision of God as profoundly involved in the real world economy. As Christians today we need to recover this dimension to our faith. We too need to realize that the kingdom is about economics. It is not good enough to say our prayers and hope for the best. We also need to seek how we can find God in the price of dairy futures and the cost of living index. And as Yahweh did we need to see our righteous anger directed against those who seek to take more than their fair share of the world's wealth.

At times like ours of great poverty and economic insecurity now is the perfect time for all of us to be seeking new ways in which we can find God's kingdom. It has always been deeply unpopular to remind people that God has an interest in economic justice. It didn't do Jesus any favors. And it goes against every fiber of our current cultural consensus towards the ruthless acquisition of wealth without thought of the wider social costs. But as followers of Christ we are called to seek God out anew in fresh places, and that includes looking for the kingdom on both Wall Street and on main street.

No one can tell you what that requires you to do. You have to reflect on that. But Jesus promises that if you do find a way of connecting your faith to your income and to your work the experience will be of infinite value. God's love in action is more precious than any amount of wealth. Or to put it another way, we discover God's kingdom when we discover that the more we search, the more we find. In the same way, the more we give, the more we receive. Amen.