

Texts: Matthew 11:25-30, Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

It is curious, to me, how the writers and editors of this book decide to skip over long periods of years without recording anything, but then they go into such fine detail, repetitive details, in one chapter like Genesis 24. Isaac needs a wife. His mother, Sarah, has died. The whole scheme, the future of the chosen clan depends on Isaac, the only link, the only one in the world, who must now get married and have children. The promise of God, once again, seems tenuous, vulnerable to all kinds of human failure. The odds are not in its favor.

The chapter began with Abraham telling his oldest servant to go back to the family homeland to find a suitable wife for his son, now 40 years old, Isaac. Wives were chosen by the parents. The locals, the Canaanite women, would not do. Isaac could not make the trip himself because that would backtrack on God's call to Abraham, to go, to leave his original home and family. One does not go back on the promise, as the heir of God's promise. So, the oldest servant of Abraham goes back.

He prays to the Lord for help in finding the right woman. He devises a plan for identifying her. He'll wait by the spring, with his ten camels nearby. He'll ask one of the young women, as the women come to draw water, for a drink. If she offers him water for the camels, as well: she's the one! Cuts through all that courtship nonsense, huh? No background checking!

It's very subtle, in this patriarchal, male-dominated society, but here an empowered voice is given to a young woman. If she says that right thing, she's in! Often, it is the women who drive much of the drama in Genesis. The God of Abraham and Sarah goes against the predominant culture of the time. This God is a nonconformist, poking at cultural conventions, giving voice and power to the persons at the fringes, the marginalized: women, foreigners. Later, it will be Rebekah who determines which of the two sons will receive the blessing, not the father Isaac. And the younger son will be chosen over the elder: radically nonconformist.

We pause to hear Jesus's words: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you've hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have shown them to babies." It's worthy of praise, in the eyes of Jesus, that God favors the least likely, the underqualified, the disenfranchised, the babies as recipients: the lost, the last, the least, captives, the poor, the sick, the sinners, the children, women and orphans. "Indeed, Father, this brings you happiness." God's saving love is revealed to those labeled losers, generating happiness within the Creator. What kind of God derives from upsetting the established order? Why, that's our God.

This same God is involved in the fine details of helping a spouse be identified for the one and only link to the promised future. Rebekah says she'd like to give water to the camels, too. At that moment (after putting a ring in her nose and bracelets on her arms), the servant bowed and worshiped and blessed the Lord – the plan for the future is revealed and confirmed in the voice of a young woman! There are some minor, potential

hitches up ahead. But her family agrees to let her go, with the servant they had just met, to an unseen husband, in an unknown land. Sounds like faith. (Gold and silver jewelry, and a new wardrobe may have also helped.) But will Rebekah want to go? Ask her: radical stuff! Her opinion matters. Her voice carries power to make God's promises real. "They called Rebekah and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?'" She said, 'I will go.'" She sounds just her soon-to-be father-in-law. Abraham said, "I will go, to the land you will show me." He went, by faith. Rebekah now goes, on the same route, from Haran to Canaan, carrying future generations into God's promise. She carried it well.

She arrives. Isaac stared out at the pasture and sees her approaching, with the camels. "Rebekah stared at Isaac." She got down from her camel and asked the servant: "Who is this man?" He says, "That's him, my master." While she considers things, covered by her scarf, the servant tells Isaac all that has happened on his trip. Isaac welcomes Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent. She becomes his wife, he loves her, we read. God weaves wonder and promise into fine details, within human choices.

I was talking with a couple, as they awaited a discharge from the hospital following successful treatment for a very serious illness. The condition reared its ugly head the first day they arrived home after a long trip. Rather than making their customary stop in Deming, NM, about four hours away from home, they decided, this time, to drive all the way, getting home late on Tuesday. They were home when the fever spiked and the rescue squad was called on Wednesday rather than being in Deming, or somewhere on the road, as they had originally planned. The Creator of heaven and earth seems to delight in such seemingly minor choices and events. Life is not random. "Indeed, Father, this brings you happiness."

"Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest." Come to me, all; all is a big word. All is a radical, counter-cultural word, delivered by the voice of Jesus. This one sentence can summarize an whole chapter of our lives, or our entire life. It is God's promise. We dwell within the moment-by-moment fine details, small decisions, minor events. God charts a direction for the journey of the faithful. "I will give you rest", Jesus says. We are on the way to that promised place: rest. The present conditions Jesus voices, we know so well. Hard struggle. Heavy loads. Overburdened. Weary. Especially for those on the edges of inclusion in "all", pushed out to the fringes. Hardship, weariness is the present, directed toward a radically different place: "I will give you rest." The odds are not in its favor. Abraham went. Rebekah went. We will get there, by keeping faith in divine promise. As if Jesus knows what we all need most: "Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light."