

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 6th Sunday After Pentecost, July 16, 2017

**The Biblical Soap Opera Concludes**  
July 16, 2017

Genesis 24: 34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Today's message concludes my series of sermons based upon the creation story and the stories about Abraham as related in Genesis.

Our scripture today is selected verses from Genesis 24 which tell the story of Abraham's quest to find a wife for Isaac. The complete scripture reading is far too long for a reading during a worship service, 67 verses in all. The suggested reading which I just read is substantially shorter and consists only of carefully selected verses.

In the story, Abraham is quite elderly and knows that he does not have much longer to live. His son Isaac is not married and, unless something is done, God's promise that a great nation will descend from Abraham cannot come to fruition.

Abraham does not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman. He wants him to marry a woman from Abraham's home country in Haran, so Abraham starts on a matchmaking quest by sending a servant to Haran to seek out a wife for Isaac from among his relatives.

Fred Craddock, et al <sup>(1)</sup> comments that the story is an engaging tale with a background of "... *the central theological theme of the patriarchal stories --- the promise of land, progeny, and blessing to all the world --- and the constant threat to its fulfillment. Would the line of Abraham be mixed with the Canaanite inhabitants of the promised land? Would Abraham's descendants --- specifically the next generation --- continue to live, like Abraham and Sarah, as sojourners in that promised land? Would obedience as well as the promise be passed on to the next generation?*"

The answer to the latter question, as we know now, was yes but it was not a simple task to arrive at that answer.

There is no explanation in scripture as to why Abraham did not want Isaac to take a Canaanite wife --- purity of religion, genealogy, or something else. We just don't know.

But, in any event, Abraham sends an unnamed servant hundreds of miles to Haran to find a wife for Isaac. This was obviously not just any old servant. It was

someone in whom Abraham had great confidence and trust, most likely the chief steward of his household.

The servant is not so sure that seeking a wife in Haran is such a good idea. Abraham has him swear to find a proper wife for Isaac in his country and among his relatives. The servant asks, "*What if the woman will not come back with me?*" Abraham says that "*The Lord ... will send his angel with you and make your journey a success.*"

The servant goes to Haran. Stands by a spring and prays, and a woman, Rebekah, comes to draw water. He talks to her, learns that she is of Abraham's clan, and goes to Rebekah's parents asking for their approval for her marriage to Isaac. Her parents and Rebekah agree and Rebekah goes with the servant to Canaan.

In those days, marriages were arranged by parents. The bride and groom rarely had much to say about who their spouse would be. Love rarely entered into it.

IF you remember the musical "Fiddler On the Roof" Tevye, the star of the story was married to Golde. Theirs was such an arranged marriage. They did not love each other. Their parents had chosen Golde to be Tevye's wife. But as the years went by, love grew.

You may remember this exchange between them:

Tevye: [*in song*] Do you love me?

Golde: [*speaking*] I'm your wife!

Tevye: [*speaking*] I know! [*in song*] But do you love me?

Golde: [*singing*] Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years, my bed is his...

Tevye: Shh!

Golde: [*singing*] If that's not love, what is?

Tevye: [*singing*] Then you love me!

Golde: I suppose I do!

Tevye: Oh. [*sings*]

Tevye: And I suppose I love you too.

Tevye, Golde: [*singing*] It doesn't change a thing, but even so... After twenty-five years, it's nice to know.

It took 25 years for Tevye and Golde in this story to realize that they loved each other, but it didn't take Rebekah and Isaac very long at all to realize it. After all, this is a

soap opera, isn't it?

It was love at first sight for Rebekah and Isaac.

Isaac sees the servant returning with Rebekah and when Isaac comes into view the servant tells her that it is Isaac. She immediately covers her face with her veil.

Isaac takes Rebekah to meet his mother Sarah and he and Rebekah are married and they loved each other.

A fairy tale? A soap opera? Sounds like it doesn't it. **No**, it is the hand of God in bringing these two people together. Tor Tevye and Golde, it took a lot of time for their love to develop and mature, With the hand of God, for Rebekah and Isaac it was immediate.

*"The final scene [in our story] describes the arrival of the caravan back in Canaan and the marriage ... the story goes beyond the legal negotiations ... to suggest that Rebekah found Isaac attractive when she first saw him and that he loved her*

*"It is a relatively secular story when compared to most others of the Pentateuch [, the first five books of the Bible,]. Yahweh is not one of the characters who acts in the story ... Prayer and ordinary events take place and then are interpreted as revealing God's intentions. But God does not speak or act directly at all. Nevertheless, one of the themes of the story in the way God cares for people in the ordinary events of life: birth, marriage, and death."*<sup>(1)</sup>

*"A father's love, a servant's faithfulness, a wife's journey to her husband's heart. This is not exactly how we connect with potential spouses today but God is still there in the background, creating intimacy, creating a container for comfort, designing loving relationships ... there is cooperation between us and God as we hope, discern, and step out in faith to form lifelong bonds for God's purpose and our delight."*<sup>(2)</sup>

Real life is not a soap opera. Real life is guided by the hand of God.

**Amen.**

1. Fred B. Craddock, et al, "Preaching Through the Christian Year - Year A," Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1992
2. A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series, compiled by Jessica Miller Kelly, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2016

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011