"Best Supporting Actor" / Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67
July 5, 2020

When we look thru scripture, we of course think of men and women who are named. In the Old Testament, we have Adam, Eve, Moses, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Noah, Deborah, Saul, David. In the New Testament, of course there are Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, Priscilla.

Rarely did these folks operate on their own; quite often they were helped by others.

This morning we have the account of Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, and the choosing of his wife. Remember – God promised Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars. And if the promise was to be fulfilled, Isaac needed a wife.

In our reading this morning, it is not Abraham, or even Isaac, who does the heavy lifting finding a wife for Isaac; it is Abraham's servant, who is unnamed. Abraham leaves the choice of his son's wife, a most important issue, to his servant. All the more important that God be involved!

Sarah has died, and Abraham is on his deathbed. Before he dies, he arranges the marriage of Isaac. He assigns the task to "the eldest of his house" – his upper servant. Abraham makes the servant swear he will not choose a wife for his son from the Canaanites, but from his home country, and his kindred. The servant is forced to take an oath, in case Abraham dies in the meantime. Isaac is the heir to the Promise; perhaps he could be seen as "the world's most eligible bachelor."

As the servant is receiving instructions from Abraham, he asks a question, "What if she…won't come back [with me]?"

Is this such an unreasonable thing to ask? It looks to me like the servant is already thinking of contingencies. Did he have doubts about the mission?

How many of us receive instructions from God, or from another leader, and we immediately pick it apart? What if this happens? What if this doesn't happen? Have you thought about…?_____?

Abraham dismisses these issues, believing in the Promise from God. Essentially, Abraham says, "Don't worry, God has given me the Promise, and the Promise will be fulfilled. No more questions!"

The servant makes his preparations, and leaves. He arrives at a particular watering hole, and as the camels are resting, he prays that Isaac's wife would appear. A beautiful young woman comes out – gosh! She might be the one!

Even at this, the servant does not give in to first impressions. He tests the circumstances, and continues to pray that she is the one. When she tells him of her family, and that she is a relative of Abraham, he praises God. The girl, named Rebekah, invites the servant to her brother's house. The servant has given her a number of gifts, and naturally the brother is interested in what this might mean. He invites the servant into his home to eat.

But the servant says, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say."

Let's read the first portion of our passage, verses 34-38: So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. [35] The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. [36] And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. [37] My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; [38] but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.'

The servant explains to Laban why he is there – to travel to his master's clan to choose a wife for his master's son.

Let's continue, verses 42-49: "I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! [43] I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," [44] and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also" – let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.'

[45] "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' [46] She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. [47] Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. [48] Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. [49] Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left."

The servant is quite explicit in his prayer about God showing him the right person. He even wants God to make the girl say the right sentences, so he would know!

How many would even dare give such explicit instructions to God? Sometimes I pray, "God, please make things perfectly clear…"

As you know, almost each week we pray for that to happen to the PNC AND to the person whom God has called to be your next pastor. But our servant was even more precise, even down to the dialogue! And wouldn't you know it, as soon as he's finished praying, the girl appears!

I knew a woman in a previous church who was a widow. She was alone, and needed someone in her life. One night she prayed specifically to God that someone would enter her life. As soon as she was finished, the phone rang. It was a man who would eventually become her husband. She specifically asked God for something, and God answered.

It's not in our reading today, but Laban's response is completely obedient to Abraham's plan, and to Abraham's faith in God's plan and God's promise. Essentially, Rebekah's brother says, "This is from the Lord, and we cannot say anything to you one way or the other." After hearing this, the servant again praises God.

Just a comment on Laban's response, "This is from the Lord, and we cannot say anything to you one way or the other." My prayer is ALSO that the Mars congregation reacts this way when the candidate for the pastor is presented. "This is from the Lord, and we cannot say anything to you one way or the other."

Then, in a rather unusual move, they ask Rebekah if SHE is willing to marry Isaac, verses 58-61: And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." [59] So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. [60] And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes."

[61] Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

This exchange demonstrates the careful attention to detail the Lord has shown in choosing this wife for Isaac.

Let's finish, verse 62: Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. [63] Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. [64] And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, [65] and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. [66] And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. [67] Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Isaac enters the story for the first time, as the servant is bringing Rebekah to him. They both lift up their eyes and see the other in the distance.

Again, this is the literary beauty of Scripture:

- We know what is happening, but the characters in the story do not.
- God's providence unfolds before their eyes
- The providential ordering of events takes place
- Isaac and his bride Rebekah, chosen by God, discover the greatness of God's leading.
- The servant tells Isaac everything that happened.
- God's guidance in the mundane areas of life is good for those who put their trust in him.

Isaac takes Rebekah as his wife, he loves her, and is comforted after his mother's death.

What have we learned from this amazing episode?

The promise of God has a future: Even though we might get bogged down in all the details, God will keep his promise.

It's OK for us to pray specific prayers: The servant had his prayer right down to the dialogue between him and Rebekah! And what did the servant do when he got to the watering hole? He prayed!

QUOTE: "[The servant] trusted that a wisdom greater than his own would light his way. But he did not assume that this guidance would be arbitrary. It would enlist his own intelligence and his consecrated common sense."

It would enlist his own intelligence and his consecrated common sense!

Ever consider this?

God will consecrate, make holy, set apart, our own intelligence and common sense!!

Talk about a miracle!

And something else – did the servant have any other criteria?

Did the servant specify:

- Height?
- Hair color?
- Clothes?
- Looks?
- Astrological sign?
- Family history?
- Net worth?
- College?
- Income potential?

No, it was something more important – it was her spirit.

And what was the servant's name? We are not told…

If we think about it, there are hundreds, if not thousands of unnamed characters in the Bible. We don't know their names, but they played important roles in the plan, the promise of God.

Do you suppose anyone will be reading your name 2,000, 4,000, 8,000 years from now? Will anyone recall what happened at 232 Crowe Avenue thousands of years out?

Probably not, but I do know one thing. Like this servant…

- Your life

- Your words
- Your prayers
- Your work
- Your touch

Can have and will have eternal consequences in God's eternal kingdom.

You also will be a best supporting actor. Amen.