

**Summer Worship Series: “Beginnings”
Before On-Line Dating**

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
6 July 2014—Sermon Text: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67
FUMC Arlington, Texas 76011

Anyone who’s ever significantly changed the course of humanity has either been
a Crackpot, a Heretic, or a Dissident.
In the case of Albert Einstein, he was all three!—(Carl Sagan).

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Last Sunday, we left Abraham and Isaac on Mt. Moriah—with Isaac intact and a ram sacrificed in his place. In the meantime, Sarah, the lad’s mother, has died. She was close to Isaac as noted in the last verse of today’s lesson: Isaac “took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.” In fact, not long after today’s story Abraham also dies. Sandwiched between the deaths of Isaac’s parents is the story of his courtship and marriage. Our lesson stitches verses together about this from Genesis 24. Hear the day’s lesson:

34 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.’ . . .

42 “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.’ . . .

58 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. 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 (Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67).

Curiously in the NRSV, the phrase, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" only occurs thirteen times, but honestly, it seems like more. When the Bible uses this phrase it is at important moments. For example, Israel's history changes when "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exodus 2:24). If this is true, then we have a subversive story on our hands. I use the word "subversive" as in "upsetting the status quo." This story is subversive because it is not about men—it is about a woman! If you have been reading our Genesis stories so far this summer, then you notice that Rebekah's story is unusual. Mixed into the stories about Abraham, Isaac, and later Jacob, here we have a biblical focus on Rebekah.

How unusual it is that Rebekah is the story's leading character. Rebekah came with a water jar on her shoulder and from the spring, drew water. She engages the servant in a conversation and remarks: "Drink, and I will also water your camels." Abraham's servant (perhaps Eliezer) asks questions and she answers. Finally he asks Rebekah's family: "if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me." Her family even asks her, "Will you go with this man?" This is not what we expect of the biblical story where patriarchy rules the day.

And yet . . . ? Isaac and Rebekah . . . or is it rather Rebekah and Isaac? When we see Rebekah guiding her favorite child Jacob later in the story, we will surely recognize which side of the parental gene pool Jacob was swimming.

But not to get ahead of ourselves I simply want us to think about the Bible as offering us something that subverts the status quo. It may be that, like this story, the Bible reminds us that women can be the heroes of their stories. This distress to the status quo may be similar to the idea that the poor have gifts to offer God—about which perhaps the rich forget. Soon enough an itinerant preacher who has no home and “nowhere to lay his head” says, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matthew 19:14).

Perhaps quaint, Maltbie Babcock’s hymn “This is my Father’s World” contains in verse three an address to injustice. Do you remember?
This is my Father’s world. O let me ne’er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet (published 1901).

Today, perhaps, owing to this story, God reminds us that God loves all people and God wills their salvation, just as God wills our salvation. To some people, this is a downright subversive idea, but this it is God’s nature.

There was a placard on a table upstairs across from our fine library that reads: “God loves everyone: Get over it!” It is a subversive idea to some, but perhaps a little subversion is good for the soul. God loves everyone—I guess that means everyone—our friends and our enemies . . . and all in between.

God later communicates with Rebekah and while unusual, God speaking with women is not unknown to scripture. Eve, Hagar, Rebekah, and Hannah each have a turn with their divine discussion partner. Later, Isaac begs God to

give his barren wife, Rebekah a child. God responds with Rebekah's twins—Jacob and Esau.

During her pregnancy, Rebekah feels the struggle between the children in her womb. She asks God, "If so, why do I exist?" God responds by telling her of the two nations in her womb and when born, the older will serve the younger. We never do it that way—it is the younger that serves the elder. Yet in the world of the Bible human ways of doing things are frequently questioned and overturned.

If you don't believe me then remember some of Jesus' sayings. The beatitudes for example: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Or "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies," "bless those who curse you, "do good to those who hate you, "and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" When Jesus tells us: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12, RSV) Jesus commands us to do for our world what we would not do on our own. It is subversive to our way of thinking, but after all it promises life and not death. Amen.