

*Prayer: God of love, we thank you for giving us the opportunity to meet so many of your people through the stories of our faith. When we experience the story of another, we experience our story in new and renewed ways. As we come to know Rebekah and Isaac, and learn from Jesus, may we be nourished and transformed to invite others to experience as well. Amen.*

Rebekah and Isaac's story is one of the greatest love stories in the Bible. Only last week Isaac was a boy with his father as they discovered the truth of the kind of sacrifice YHWH-God wanted – and human / child sacrifice was NOT it. Abraham was convinced God would provide the sacrifice and the ram was found, and last week David led us with interesting reflections on this passage.

This week Ishmael is not mentioned only "Isaac", the – THE only heir of the fabulously wealthy Abraham needs a wife. If the promise of God was once again going to succeed – Abraham's heir needed to have children. Just as once God had provided the ram for the sacrifice instead of Isaac, so for the fulfilment of the promise that Abraham would be father of **nations**, *Isaac* needed a wife! Isaac in our text today is about 40. His mother Sarah, has died and Abraham at 140 was feeling his years! cV

Abraham wants a wife for his son *from within* his own tribe. From within his own people, culture and religion. I think we understand this – I have a story from my uni years which tells me that this issue is far from an **ancient tension** for people. One member of my 'group' completing a Zoology major BSc, was Rajiv, a NZ born Indian. He was as NZ as the rest of us and he came complete with Dunedin born nz-european live-in girl-friend. But one morning it was apparent to everyone there was something very wrong in his life. When we got him to talk we found out he was completely shattered, his parents, (his mother) had decided it was time for him to marry and she had arranged for the trip to India to meet the bride the family had arranged for him.

His parents wanted the same thing as Abraham, a wife within the 'family' / culture / customs / religion. Abraham sent his most trusted servant off on trip of over 644 km (400 miles) with 10 thirsty camels and a small fortune in jewels. All of this 'stuff' would have been traditional bride – bartering material, what is not so often included is the **prayer base** for the servant's search! God answers the Servants prayers and the almost perfect match is found.

H Wallace says: "...she has all the desired qualities deemed in ancient Israel to be those of an ideal wife and mother. She is 'fair' to look at, she is a virgin; she is friendly, generous, kind-hearted and decisive. She is even concerned for the welfare of animals. Most of all, she is obedient. However, the servant does not yet know if she also qualifies as one of Abraham's people. He himself has come on this mission out of obedience to Abraham and faith in Yahweh. He asks Rebekah whose daughter she is. When he hears that she is the granddaughter of Nahor (Abraham's brother), he rejoices that God has led him to the very house where he will find a suitable bride for Isaac. He explains his mission to Rebekah's brother Laban, and to her father Bethuel. As they listen, they too are convinced that this is the work of God."

Rebekah is given the choice of when she will go – and they set out immediately with the blessing on her: "'Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies.'" - Did you hear the echo of the blessing Abraham had? Rebekah is to be the 'mother of Israel – as Sarah was. And of course as soon as Rebekah got close she saw Isaac, met and married him and then love entered the relationship, and **they**, contrary to the prevailing culture remained in a monogamous relationship all their lives. ***They loved each other*** – and through them the fragile thread holding the promise of the Israelite nation continued.

So why do we have this ancient – even pivotal tribal love story for the people of God matched with Jesus words in Matthew today?

**Firstly** if we listen to Jesus words he is challenging his listeners, remember he is not addressing children, only saying there is a group of people ‘like-children’ calling out to ‘others’. They, “the others” are not playing by the ‘rules’. They are ‘all talk and no walk’; their actions do not match their theology – saying one thing and doing another.... We have a multitude of saying to describe this – I recon this makes it a *common occurrence* in our culture / society.

**Jesus** says ‘Wisdom is proved **right** by her actions’. In Jesus day, ‘Wisdom’ / Ruach was another name for God’s Breath / Spirit. In Proverbs 8 Wisdom has been part of God’s presence from before creation. I understand this to be reminding us that God’s Wisdom is one of the tools given to us to help us walk our talk. And the next few verses speak into the close relationship of Jesus and God the Father. We have Trinitarian theology without the doctrine!

With Jesus, Wisdom and God we become truth – filled people who **do** what is right according to YHWH –in Jesus – in us. We live out our prayers and so make Jesus real, Jesus’ rules real, Jesus lifestyle real and a viable way of living. NO falsehoods – no double lives of saying one thing and doing another – or saying one thing to one person and the opposite to another – or deliberately twisting events or actions to suit our wants. John didn’t drink so he was rejected as being demon-filled; Jesus did mix with those who drank etc and he was a drunkard...

Neither Jesus nor John fitted with the prevailing culture –within their ‘church’ and both depended on the presence of God in their lives to empower them to do what was right by Wisdom’s measure. Just as Rebekah and Isaac’s story happened because of prayer and belief in YHWH; happened with them all acting on the prayer answers; stepping out and trusting the situation before them was a ‘God-involved’ one; just as Rebekah and Isaac trusted – so John and Jesus trusted – and so Jesus tells us to trust.

We are surrounded by prevailing cultures – customs, habits, religions, religious thoughts – some of which are God-inspired (Wise even!), some are neutral, some are dangerous, while others are evil... All of them exist because in our humanity we need to belong. To belong in or to **our** ‘tribe’, which in today’s world is more than blood-family. It is more than school friends; sports team mates, Rotary or Probus friendships; Home-group or Bible-study friends, in today’s world it needs to include your faith community as a deliberate choice.

We have so many choices that sometimes we are unsure how to select the right ones to belong to and the weight of maintaining our ‘tribal connections’ is very heavy. We are so often unsure how to select and keep selecting life giving, challenging, good environments that we know will expose ourselves to God’s Wisdom, teachings, life-giving ways. Scholars tell us that in this passage about heavy weights placed on people Jesus was talking about the ‘church’! Life is a heavy burden then we place extra / we carry extra **because** of the church. Jesus says: he is not the church. **He** is not the church, his burden is light, his yoke is easy which means it is hand made to fit each and every one. We have a unique, one of a kind relationship with him and the way we are tied into him, linked into him is hand crafted by him.

Life is about experience – some are good and full of learning and love like we heard about with Rebekah and Isaac – some are heavy and difficult where it doesn’t matter what we do, we lose. We want lives with love story’s that end ‘happily-ever-after’ and while Rebekah and Isaac’s is a **great** story, wait for the next instalments. Life’s experiences very rarely end ‘happily-ever-after’ even when love based.

**We have choices** – to allow ourselves to become weighed down, or keep hold of the promises of Jesus in prayer and in action living under his yoke, carrying his burden. To live in a *counter culture* to what is around us by loving God, neighbour and self. To know this is the best and **wisest** way to live, fulfilling God’s promises for all nations, and belonging to the tribe that includes Isaac and Rebekah! Amen