

Anglican Church Noosa
Genesis 24 and 25
Passing the Torch
The Patriarchs – Call | Covenant | Cost
Rev'd Chris Johnson

I love the movie Back to the Future – all 3 of them. I love the scenes where Marty has to travel back to the 1950's to make sure his parents meet each other and fall in love. His father George McFly is a bit of a dropkick. Very dopy and unsure of himself. He has a crush on Lorraine but doesn't know how to ask her out. Marty gives him some advice.

"You got to go up to her and say to her, 'You are my destiny.'" George plucks up the courage to speak to her and delivers the line, "You are my density."

We all love a good 'boy meets girl' story. And this morning that's what we get in Genesis Chapter 24.

Our Reading is about finding a wife for Isaac, but the focus is not on him; It is on the bride to be – Rebekah and the story of her family.

So let's look at the story so far.

In Week 1. Genesis 12 - Abraham is promised he will become a great nation. This will happen through the birth of a special child.

In Week 2. Genesis 16 - 10 years later Abraham and Sarah despair that God doesn't seem to be keeping his promise. They take matters into their own hands and Ishmael is born. But then surprise,

Genesis 18 -three visitors bring a message from God. In twelve months' time, Sarah will be pregnant. She laughs at them in disbelief.

Then in week 3, Genesis 21, Isaac is born and Sarah laughs but this time with Joy.

This week we move on to the next generation and the life of Isaac. Isaac is in need of a wife. Back in those days marriages were arranged so our story today begins with Abraham seeking a wife for Isaac. Abraham says to his servant, *"Do not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I'm living, but go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."* (Gen 24:3,4)

The servant travels to the town of Nahor and sets up a little test. He goes to a well where the women of the town come to draw water. He is going to ask one of the young women for a drink. If she offers him a drink, but then also offers to water his camels, he will take that as a sign that this is the woman God has chosen for Isaac. It is not a bad little test is it? This would reveal someone who goes the second mile. – prepared to say yes to the request of a thirsty traveller, but then also to offer to water thirsty camels.

There are a number of places in the Bible that say we shouldn't ask for a sign or put God to the test. That is the general rule, however on special occasions especially in the Old Testament, God's servants can pray for a sign. On this occasion it is appropriate and God ever so graciously answers quickly and profoundly.

V15 *"Before he had finished praying Rebekah came out with a jar on her shoulder."* The text tells us –

- She is a relative of Abraham.
- She is very beautiful.
- She is a virgin.
- She gives the servant a drink when he asks for it, and then says,
“I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink.”

Rebekah seems like an amazing woman –

- helpful, - v18 offers the servant a drink,
- generous – v19 offers to water the camels as well,
- energetic - v20 she ran back to the well to draw water for the camels, and I imagine watering 10 camels is no mean feat.
- hospitable - v28 enthusiastically brings the servant to her home, and most importantly,
- a lady of faith - v57 she is ready to leave her home and family and journey to the land of promise.

There is a sense here of a willingness to be a part of God’s greater purpose. And all to marry a man she hasn’t even set eyes on yet. That’s faith isn’t it?

We should also note the Servant’s faith. When he arrives in Nahor, he asks God for help in finding the right woman. His interactions throughout the story are all very respectful, yet also assertive about his mission. In v55 the family want to have a cooling off period of 10 days, probably because they are being protective of Rebekah and wanting to be sure this will be in her best interests.

The Servant however replies in v56 *“Do not detain me, now that the Lord has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my Master.”* This is the point at which Rebekah actually gets to have a say in the matter. That’s nice isn’t it? She is willing to go immediately. We are not told the reason she is willing to jump so quickly.

One could be cynical and say the enormous wealth of the family sending a servant with 10 camels laden with gifts was a factor. And owning a camel back in those days was a sign of wealth.

I think the sense of the text and more likely explanation is Rebekah believed this was God’s call on her life and she was ready to obey.

She obviously didn’t know the backstory like we have come to know it over the last three weeks. But after she had said yes, she may have started to get a hint of it in the blessing from her family. V60 *“Our Sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the cities of their enemies.”*

What a wonderful testimony to the faith of her family. Everywhere you look in the story you find God’s providential hand, and the characters of the story willing to submit to God’s providential will. It is certainly not always like that in the stories of the Patriarchs, but on this occasion, the Biblical themes of faith, hope and love shine through.

The climax of the story comes in v62 ff as the Servant with Rebekah and her attendants come into the Negev where Isaac is staying. Rebekah sees him and inquires of the servant if he is the one. The answer is yes. She is very respectful in placing a veil over her head. Isaac brings her into the tent of his mother Sarah and they get married.

Don't worry about

- hiring a wedding planner, or
- posting wedding invitations or
- organising the caterer, or
- even doing a marriage preparation course!

The text is so simple, so unembellished; you could say unromantic; however it does go on to say that Rebecca became his wife, and he loved her, and he found comfort after his mother's death.

And I think that is rather beautiful in its simplicity.

So what are **the takeaways** for us today from this passage?

Firstly, **God keeps his promises.**

His promise to Abraham back

- In Genesis 12 v2 was, *"I will make you into a great nation."*
- In Genesis 15 v5 *"Look up the sky Abraham and count the stars – if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be?"*
- In Genesis 17 v2 *"I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."*

Isaac is the fulfilment of all these promises. Not only Isaac but all the descendants who would come after Isaac. If Isaac is going to have descendants then Isaac has to get married and have children.

God makes sure it happens.

His providential care is played out in the story of finding a wife for Isaac. God keeps his promises.

So whatever you are going through
at the moment,

trust God's promises to you in Christ -

- the forgiveness of sin,
- your adoption as his son or daughter,
- the gift of the Holy Spirit,
- the blessing of the body of Christ, God's Church,
- the hope of glory and Christ's final victory.

All these things and so much more when you read the New Testament.

- God kept his promises to the patriarchs.
- "In Christ" He will keep his promises to you as well.

God keeps His promises.

The 2nd Takeaway is that **God uses ordinary people** in the ordinary circumstances of their lives. On this occasion it was about two people getting married. We are not told about their feelings, which of course is the first question we ask.

I imagine they would have been very nervous getting married, as most people are.

It's a big commitment. They were only meeting on their wedding day. That is an even bigger step of faith.

But here is God

-Using the human institution of marriage

-Using two flawed people (as we will come to see).

Here is God working behind the scenes to achieve his salvation purposes.

God uses ordinary people and if he has called you in Christ he is using you too.

The 3rd Takeaway is that we have to exercise faith.

Faith isn't trumpeted from the mountain tops in this story, but it is quietly and gently woven into the fabric of the story.

One does get the sense that all the characters in the story knew God was in this union, and they were submitting to his plans.

- Abraham trusted God to provide an angel to guide his servant to the right woman.
- The Servant prayed and asked God for help.
- Rebekah was a godly, generous woman who showed her faith through her servant heart, and then her willingness to leave everything behind and go with the Servant immediately.
- Rebekah's family show their faith in the hospitality they offer Abraham's Servant and in their willingness to let Rebecca go with such a great blessing.

All of the characters are submitting to God's will and that is the essence of faith.

So three takeaways this morning –

1. God keeps his promises
2. God uses ordinary people
3. We have to have faith

My friends, I think you would all be aware Lynda and I are retiring in October.

I've had a few people expressing concern about what the future holds. It is only natural there might be some anxiety when the future is unknown. But what a wonderful opportunity to exercise faith.

Isaac and Rebekah exercised faith committing to a marriage in which they didn't know what the future would bring.

Whatever you are facing personally and whatever concerns you may have about the future of our church; we walk into the future holding the hand of Christ, we walk by faith.

You should be aware that Brad and Dave are not going anywhere in the immediate future. Brad will be the Locum minister across the parish with Dave assisting. So in many ways everything will continue to be familiar.

However, you need to be aware that neither of them will be as available as in the past. They will be responsible for all services across the three centres. And pastoral responsibility across all three congregations.

They will also be handling all the administration that happens from the Diocese and through Parish Council.

So I want to encourage everyone across the parish is to step up in faith. Is there something God is calling you to do so that services here on a Sunday continue to run smoothly.

One area you can especially pray about is our children's and youth ministries. Dave is not going to be able to be here on a Sunday morning as much as in the past, as he will be needed to lead the 9.30 service at Tewantin. Would you be able to assist with the children or youth? Pray that these ministries will continue to flourish, and ask God if you can assist with that.

Our Vision is living to love and proclaim Jesus. We have the whole of the Bible story from Genesis to Revelation. Isaac and Rebecca only had the story up to Genesis 25 at this stage. They stepped out in faith and trusted God. We can step out and trust God in faith as well.

This morning we did read ahead into Genesis 25. This is a bit like the promo at the end of a television show giving you a taste of the story in the next episode. Yes, Isaac and Rebecah do have children, in fact twins - Esau and Jacob. This morning might have been reasonably smooth sailing, but look out for some turbulent times ahead. Esau and Jacob wrestle with one another in the womb and then for the rest of their lives.

Make sure you stay tuned, same time, same place next week.

Let me pray.

Lord, thank you for the Patriarchs.

Thank you for the faithfulness of Abraham, Abraham's servant, Rebekah's family, and of course Rebekah herself.

Please lead us into the faith of the Patriarchs, that issues in obedience, that we might be faithful in seeing your church grow and flourish at this time.

And may it be for your glory;
in Jesus' name. Amen.