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Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 Designing Love
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 Common English Bible

The man said, "I am Abraham's servant. The Lord has richly blessed my master, has made him a great man, and has given him flocks, cattle, silver, gold, men servants, women servants, camels, and donkeys. My master's wife Sarah gave birth to a son for my master in her old age, and he's given him everything he owns. My master made me give him my word: 'Don't choose a wife for my son from the Canaanite women, in whose land I'm living. No, instead, go to my father's household and to my relatives and choose a wife for my son.'

"Today I arrived at the spring, and I said, 'Lord, God of my master Abraham, if you wish to make the trip I'm taking successful, when I'm standing by the spring and the young woman who comes out to draw water and to whom I say, 'Please give me a little drink of water from your jar,' and she responds to me, 'Drink, and I will draw water for your camels too,' may she be the woman the Lord has selected for my master's son.' Before I finished saying this to myself, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder and went down to the spring to draw water. And I said to her, 'Please give me something to drink.' She immediately lowered her water jar and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels something to drink too.' So I drank and she also gave water to the camels. Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son whom Milcah bore him.' I put a ring in her nose and bracelets on her arms. I bowed and worshipped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who led me in the right direction to choose the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. Now if you're loyal and faithful to my master, tell me. If not, tell me so I will know where I stand either way."

They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?"

She said, "I will go."

So they sent off their sister Rebekah, her nurse, Abraham's servant, and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, saying to her,

"May you, our sister, become thousands of ten thousand; may your children possess their enemies' cities."

Rebekah and her young women got up, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

Now Isaac had come from the region of Beer-lahai-roi and had settled in the arid southern plain. One evening, Isaac went out to inspect the pasture, and while staring he saw camels approaching. Rebekah stared at Isaac. She got down from the camel and said to the servant, "Who is this man walking through the pasture to meet us?"

The servant said, "He's my master." So she took her headscarf and covered herself. The servant told Isaac everything that had happened. Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent. He received Rebekah as his wife and loved her. So Isaac found comfort after his mother's death.

I am a planner. I think that's one of the reasons why this time has been so stressful, I can't plan. I don't know what the future holds because everything seems so uncertain. Life felt uncertain for Abraham's family, too. We have been hitting some Genesis highlights for the past few weeks. We have heard the story of creation, of Abraham and Sarah hosting three visitors from God, Hagar and Ishmael being left to die in the desert, and Abraham nearly killing his son, Isaac. Today, Isaac is all grown and ready to get married. Isaac's mom, Sarah has died and the future of the family feels uncertain. Abraham and Sarah were supposed to have a family as numerous as the sand, as many as the stars in the sky, a family that would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Now, there is just Abraham and his son, Isaac.

Abraham has a plan because Abraham for the last thirteen chapters of Genesis has made plans. Abraham trusts God when God tells him to take his family and to leave his country and go to a place that God will show him. Abraham trusts God that he and Sarah, well beyond childbearing years, will have a son. Abraham trusts God, but he also makes his own plans.

I get that. We get that in the church. We are a planning people. We trust God, but we also make plans. Abraham's plan is to get Isaac a wife. Yes, this is patriarchal, that a woman has to be obtained by a group of men, that the value of women in ancient societies like this is in their ability to have children. It is hard to read and it should be. There are patriarchal elements in these

ancient stories and instead of explaining them away, I think it is important to admit that we have not eradicated patriarchy in our own time as well.

So, a wife, but not a local one. Abraham insists that a wife be found for Isaac from among his own people, in Haran, the place he left years ago and that is miles and miles away. One more thing, Isaac can't go. Abraham proposes that a wife be found for his son from among a distant people and that the husband-to-be not even be present to make the offer. Good luck with that.

Abraham's servant, Eliezer, is given this task. Abraham's servant is the oldest of his household and the one who is in charge of everything and he is smart. This entire story is sixty-seven verses long and is one of the longest stories in all of Genesis. It is longer than the creation stories. We get two versions of the same events. First, the narrator's version and then Eliezer's version, which is what we heard.

Eliezer has a plan. He is going to ask to be shown someone kind and hospitable and strong, someone who can handle animals and isn't afraid of strangers. Then we meet Rebekah. She is decisive and full of courage. Rebekah is not forced to go, but she freely chooses to leave home for the unknown. She says yes before she knows any details. She chooses to follow the voice of God into the unknown.

Rebekah and Isaac meet and there isn't much that we would recognize as marriage or even courtship as we know it today, but it seems like there is tenderness and love.

We said at the beginning of Genesis that God brings harmony out of chaos. God also designs us for love and brings people together for lifelong relationships. What is your oldest friendship? Someone who you could be yourself with? You don't have to be on your guard with them. I have a friend like that in Houston. We grew up together and even went to the same college. We try to get together once a year and it's like no time has passed. We have shared history and we are comfortable with each other.

In my reading this week, I read about Jackie Robinson, the first Black man to play modern major league baseball. Moses Fleetwood Walker was actually the first Black man to play professional baseball in the 1880s, six decades before Jackie Robinson. It was Jackie Robinson's first season with the Brooklyn Dodgers and he faced hatred nearly everywhere he traveled. There were fastballs thrown at his head and he was called the most hateful things from the opposing team and from the crowds. There was a game in Boston where the taunts and the racial slurs seemed to reach a peak. Another Dodgers player, a Southerner named Pee Wee Reese, called time out. He walked from his position at shortstop toward Robinson at second base. He put his arm around Robinson's shoulder, and stood there with him for what seemed like a long time. The gesture spoke more than words ever could. His action said this man is my friend.

This story in Genesis reminds us that we are still here. God's people persist 4,000 years after this story. God always sustains us. God's creative spirit brings light out of darkness and promise out of pain. God's creative spirit brings love out of loneliness. From the vastness of the universe to the intricacies of the human heart, 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 for our delight.

About four years ago I heard that a church member was not going to return to Greenland Hills because they were angry with me that I said Black lives matter too much. This person felt like I should have said that blue lives matter as well. It hurt my heart so much and I wanted to have a conversation with this person. I called, I texted, I emailed, I wrote a letter, but I received no response. I looked back at my sermons and yes, I did say Black lives matter. I said it when 12-year-old Tamir Rice was killed in Cleveland holding a toy gun, when Michael Brown was

shot in Ferguson, Missouri, when Freddie Gray died in a police van after being arrested for having a switchblade. I talked about Eric Garner's last words as he was placed in a fatal chokehold, "I can't breathe." I still think about and pray for this individual. They defriended me on Facebook, but their profile is public so I can still see their posts. Every once in a while, I will look them up and see how they are doing. If I needed any proof this week about God's creative spirit, I found it when I found that this person has been posting about how Black lives matter. This person has even been arguing with people who say differently!

It has been so fascinating to me that in the risk of different activities, going to church is pretty risky. I wondered why that was. Then I thought about how we function as a church. We have old people and toddlers in the same space, all worshipping God together. We have shared coffee and donuts. We sing. We share the peace. God's creative spirit has made us for relationship. We desire to find community, to create family. We have to keep choosing each other. New life is always possible. Thanks be to God, Amen!