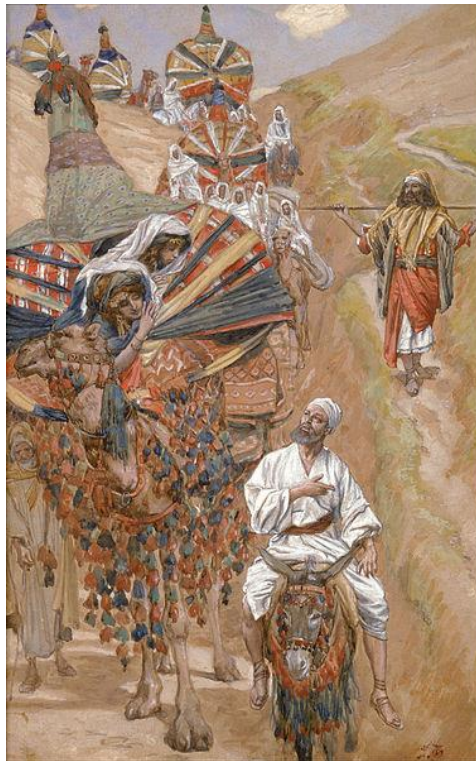


**A Sermon for The Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
July 9, 2023**



Rebecca Meets Isaac by the Way, By James Jacques Joseph Tissot

**Rev. Barbara Bond
New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH**

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[Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

6 Pentecost:

July 9, 2023

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The Rev Barbara Bond

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67, Song of Solomon 2:8-13, Matthew 11:25-30

Enlarging the family

This summer we are hearing the story of a specific family, four generations, chosen by God to begin God's salvation history of the human race. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are wonderful stories of how God created and managed the world in pre-historic times, stories that include Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Ark, and the Tower of Babel. These stories are part of our heritage, but they have much in common with stories from other cultures. When we come to the story of Abraham, however, the Bible gets much more specific. We follow this one family, with all its twists and turns for 38 chapters of Genesis, and through it, we learn much about God's love for God's people. The Abraham Saga, and the stories of his offspring, are formative for our faith. And not just ours. We speak of three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. All three really begin with Abraham.

Today we join the story when Abraham is fading from the picture. God promised Abraham a son, and even though Abraham and his wife Sarah started to doubt, God was faithful, and they had a child, Isaac. Isaac means "laughter" and Abraham and Sarah must have really laughed when he came along when they were in their nineties. Isaac is a hinge character in this story – we actually don't know too much about him except that his father nearly killed him. Fortunately, Isaac survived, and now it is time for him to get married.

Often in our liturgy we invoke "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Three generations laid out for us, showing God's love and determination that his people will survive. I have often wondered why we don't say, "The God of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel." After all, there would be no continuation of the line without the wives.

The story we hear today is not about Isaac. It is really about his wife, Rebekah. Her story in many ways parallels the story of Abraham. God called

Abraham to leave his home and travel far into Canaan. When it comes time for Isaac to marry, Abraham sends a servant way back to where he came from, so that Isaac's wife would be of his own people. Abraham was called out of Mesopotamia, and so was Rebekah.

In the story, Abraham's servant sets up an elaborate test when he gets back to Abraham's original land. The servant will go to the town well, and he will wait for some young woman to come to fetch water. If it is the right woman, she will graciously offer him water, and will also generously offer water to his camels. And she does! This must be the one!

Rebekah responds to the servant with generosity in the manner of desert hospitality. We remember the famous story of Abraham, who did the same thing when visited by three angels in the middle of the desert – he and Sarah served up a sumptuous banquet and did everything possible to make their guests comfortable. Rebekah does likewise. She's the one, all right, following in Abraham's footsteps – literally, since she will leave her home and travel far to her future husband's home.

The story becomes especially beautiful as Rebekah nears her new home. She sees Isaac from a distance; Isaac sees her from a distance. It is evening, she dismounts from her camel, covers herself with her veil, and meets Isaac. He takes her into his mother's tent – Sarah, the matriarch, had recently died, and now Rebekah takes her place. Isaac marries Rebekah, and he loves her. I trust that she also loved him. The canticle from the Song of Solomon that we read this morning describes love so beautifully: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Rebekah came willingly to this relationship, and she came away from her home. The canticle expresses the love of a couple for each other. It is sometimes read at weddings. It is also an Easter text. Notice how it continues:

"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;
For now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come,
And the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land."

The hard wintertime is over, and the earth bursts forth in beauty. The promise of the verdant earth echoes God's promise of eternal life. Life continues, carried by God's love for us, and our love for one another. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus speaks of a blessed yoke – this yoke is the love of God, where we will find rest for our souls. We are yoked to God, and we are yoked together in community, yoked with love, surely God's greatest gift to humanity – love that we hear of first in the family of Abraham, and carried down to us by Jesus and his followers, and all the way to this community of New Life, and out our doors into the wider world. The God of Sarah and Abraham, of Rebekah and Isaac, of Rachel and Jacob – our family through the ages, founded in love.

Amen!