

# Sermon on Genesis 24:24-67: The Call of Rebekah

Fr. Joel Steiner -- July 5, 2020

Come Holy Spirit, come like a fire and burn. Come like a wind and cleanse. Convict, convert, and consecrate our hearts to our great good and to your great glory. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

On a whole, Genesis is clearly driven by God's action, yet today's passage gives us God's calling of Rebekah in a far more human plot. The story echoes Abraham's call so strongly that one commentator states that "while Isaac inherits the body of Abraham, Rebekah inherits his soul." (Reno, 215). Yet this is easy to miss, wrapped as it were in a long story of very human interactions. Of course, this raises the question: why does God act quietly? Or at least, what might it have to say about our own lives?

But that question is getting ahead of ourselves, first we need to sit again with how God calls Rebekah. Before the servant heads out, Abraham assures him "The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful." After all that we've seen happen with Abraham, we might expect that an angel would appear to Rebekah in a dream, or perhaps a star would guide the servant to the well. But instead a very human story unfolds. The servant stumbles onto the right well and finds a generous woman who is also a relative of Abraham. The necessary arrangements for the dowry are handled in a smooth yet ceremonious fashion. Rebekah agrees to go with the servant and the following marriage comforts Isaac who is still mourning his mother's death. Though there is a rich drama in the texture of these scenes, God does nothing directly. Yes, the servant is right to declare that God directed him to Rebekah—I'm not disputing that—but it's a pretty tame story in comparison to God's direct, disruptive

commands and visions to Abraham and others who came before him. Most of this story could have been pulled from a Jane Austen novel.

And yet even within these mundane interactions, it is clear that Abraham and Rebekah's callings and lives are cut from the same cloth. They are both from the house of Terah. They are both called away from their family to a foreign land. "And like Abraham, Rebekah hearkens to her call" (Reno, 215). "I will go" she simply says. And as she leaves, her blessing from her family echoes God's blessing on Abraham. It anticipates that she will become the mother of nations and possess the land. All of these connections are particularly compelling in contrast to Isaac, who at the end of today's passage we find still mourning his mother's death, wandering where Hagar had hopelessly wandered as she pled for Ishmael's life. From the shape of their two stories it is clear that Rebekah, not Isaac, is the one who embodies the pattern of Abraham's faith. She responds to God's call, leaves her father's house, and directs her life toward the promised future.

Reflectin on these parallels this week I realized that they are not only beautiful; they also challenge our assumptions about how God calls and guides us. Often after asking God to guide me, I end up only waiting for something dramatic like the call of Abraham, rather than watching for the quiet call of Rebekah. It reminded me of a how one of my spiritual directors along the way pushed me to question how I was talking about God's guidance in my life. "What if God's guidance is as simple as being faithful in this moment as your life unfolds?" he asked. What if it's as simple as letting our love as a son or daughter, friend or spouse, father or mother direct our choices? As serving others with our gifts, and responding in love to those who cross our path today? Sure, God still acts dramatically in our lives, but how often do we operate with a "god-of-the-gap" assumption, defaulting towards seeing things as only natural unless they reach beyond what we can explain, and only then do we consider that God is up to

something? Yet Rebekah's acceptance that God led the servant to her points to a different view of life, one where God quietly guides the mundane to call us into our future.

COVID-19 has completely upset everyone's plans for this year. We are all asking a lot of questions right now. Questions about whether or not we send kids to daycare, about what retirement might look like, about what caring for our neighbour can look like, about how to be the church well, about our jobs of course... I would love if tonight God came to me in a dream and provided some real clarity. And who knows: maybe God will. But Rebekah's story reminds us of another possibility: that God is quietly acting within the mundane, human details of our lives. While our big overarching questions about this time will likely persist, in faith we can receive this day as a gift from God and trust that God will quietly draw us into the fulfillment of God's promises.