

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC
July 9, 2017

“She Has a Mind of Her Own”

“... They said, ‘We will call the girl, and ask her.’
And they called Rebekah, and said to her,
‘Will you go with this man?’ She said, ‘I will.’”
Genesis 24: 57-58

PRELUDE

As I indicated a couple of weeks ago,
this summer many of our Sunday lessons
will come from Genesis, the first book
in the Bible, where the “first things” of
faith and life are recorded.

Four generations pass through the Genesis
timeline, from chapters 12-50. It is my intent
simply that we reacquaint ourselves with
this material and ponder its application
in our lives.

We look forward to hearing about
Jacob and Esau, rival twins (Genesis 25),
Jacob’s ladder dream (Genesis 28),
and then Jacob’s odd marital
arrangement with Leah and Rachel.
So - lot’s of drama to anticipate.

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Our scripture lesson this morning
is a rather complicated tale. And it may not
be familiar to us - it is a chapter sectioned
between material more lively and more likely
to attract our attention.

Some background – you will recall from a previous week’s lesson, Abraham and Sarah, after many barren years together, have a child together, a son whom they named Isaac.

Isaac was delivered as a promise of God. For Abraham and Sarah, though, it was an unplanned pregnancy.

They just didn’t see it coming.

But come Isaac did – and he becomes Abraham’s heir apparent – Isaac is to serve as the channel that will keep hope alive for God’s people, dedicated to living in God’s promise.

Chapter 24 begins with reference to Abraham’s age – he is seemingly in the twilight of life, **“well advanced in years.”** He sees Isaac coming of age, transitioning from the status of a child to that of an adult. And he is ready for marriage.

Abraham and Isaac are in the land, in a place with a people where God seemingly has placed them. There exists, though, a certain internal tension with Abraham –

he is in the place with the people where God has determined he be.

But Abraham is an alien in the land, and he isn’t comfortable with the notion that Isaac might marry into the native clans that reside in the land. He hasn’t fully assimilated. He has a consciousness of “us” and “them.”

Let me be clear: Abraham doesn’t want Isaac to go back from whence he first had come. That’s not an option. A “right to return” is not on the table. But Abraham doesn’t want Isaac getting mixed up with the people of the

land in which they now reside. We might say:
Abraham likes the neighborhood – he just
doesn't like the neighbors.

A central character in this story is a servant – unnamed,
but clearly a trusted and respected charge; the “servant”
receives a commission to go back to what once was home,
Nahor (Genesis 24:10), connect with people living there, and
find Isaac a bride.

It is a tall order, filled with uncertainty.
The servant sets off, basically hoping to buy a bride.

The servant sets off with a train of camels
and goods, and journeys his way to where
once Abraham lived. Arriving at a well,
he encounters Rebekah, daughter of
Bethuel and Milcah, sister to Laban.
Brother Laban is a critical character,
both now and in a generation to come.
As it turns out, Rebekah is eligible
and available for marriage, if a deal can be
negotiated – and Laban is pretty much the
chief negotiator, brother dealing sister.

When we read the scripture,
it seems rather innocent.
All is happening according to plan.
But this is a misreading, I think.
What we have is marriage as
 financial transaction,
an exchange of goods, finding the right price,
with Rebekah something of a pawn
 in the parley.

We read: the servant representing the Abraham
LLC, brings out jewelry, silver, gold, and garments.
The gifts are lavish, and they are shared with
Rebekah and her family. They “party hardy”

through a night, and they seem to have struck a deal.
Until the servant readies to depart -
 when Rebekah's family -
in particular brother Laban and mother,
request a delay, a postponement of closure.
There is an impasse, broken only when Rebekah
comes center stage, and is asked the question:
"Will you go with this man?"

This is where I suggest to pause and linger for
a moment. Rebekah - is faced with a great decision.

What future will she embrace?
What role will she play in the
 unfolding of her life -
will she accept an assignment as
determined by someone other than herself?
Or will she stand up - at least to
the pressures of her immediate family circle,
so as to advance - to step into new adventure,
and break away from the comforts of
what is known and routine?

The question is so simple -
yet it will determine the future -
Rebekah - will you go?

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Rebekah - **"living venturously;"**
living not a life of convention,
 not a life of submission,
 not as a pawn in the somebody else's scheme,
 or expectation,
but a young lady, having a say, giving voice,
 in what options are presented to her.

Rebekah is willing to be a trailblazer
 for a new chapter in life.

She has, we might say,
 a mind of her own, and she is permitted
 free exercise, to determine
 what turn her life will take.
She is willing to break from the past,
 and brave the future.

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This past week – the 31st General Synod of the UCC,
meeting in Baltimore.

Three great loves – stemming from the great commandment we
have received from Jesus - Matthew 22:37-41 –
invitation to practice faith:

- (1) love of neighbor;
- (2) love of children; - - - “a just world for all”
- (3) love of creation.

Will we practice faith to demonstrate such love,
that reflects “a just world for all?”

Curious – what form and shape this might take –
if we choose to embrace the program ...

**“It is our choices, Harry, that
show what we truly are,
ar more than our abilities”**
*(Harry Potter and the Chamber
of Secrets; Dumbledore to Harry,
who is fretting about his nature,
and his quest to understand who he
is, as he is, in the world).*

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Synod reflections:

The time shared with Barbara Brown Zikmund in a workshop,
reflecting a bit upon our past.

1959 - Call to Christian Action in Society

Quite moved by language in a Declaration on American Culture (Sec. 21):

“Now as always God calls us to a new life that offers genuine meaning, faith, and community. God sets before us goals that are higher than comfort and success.”

God summons us to develop our capacities for mental and spiritual growth.

God frees us from our bondage to networks of opinion and taste.

God save us from calling good evil and evil good.

God searches the streets of our cities and the by-ways of the countryside - not for the church that takes pride in its popularity, its wealth, or the splendor of its buildings - but for the church that does justice and seeks truth, that cares for people and loves the Gospel, lifting up family, community, and world.”

When followed was a call for the churches to pray and work. To pray and work for a more just, more understanding, more responsible expression of faith ... what is so.

Yesterday - we celebrated the life of Ian Rolland. Remarkable - how one person can make such a tremendous difference in the world. He was a leader, and we need such leaders, but also I was much aware he couldn't have accomplished what he did without community.

He wasn't just concerned about racial discord, he went to work to desegregate a school system.

He wasn't just an individual who respected and affirmed LGBTQ folks - he supported policy that provided protection

against discrimination. He worked with others, where he could, to bring about what change would benefit a wider expression of care and concern.

He had a mind of his own –
and he used it for the good of others.

The great issues never go away.
And we dare not avoid them,
lest we be found deficient in faith
worthy of our calling.

It has been said:
“everything has a price.”
To be or not to be;
to tax or not to tax;
to open or close the streets
 on a Sunday;
to follow or refrain
 from following.

Come unto me, Jesus once said to the disciples,
weary and heavy burdened; come and take
my yoke and learn from me
(Matthew 11:28-30) – in so doing he promised,
we find rest for our souls.

May we be wise and bold and daring
in the choice that is ours whether and
to what extent we follow. May we
be receptive to Jesus learnings and
leadings, to go and do what work is
needed today.

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,
for the demands of the day are many;
so be charitable as you read; and remember:
the contents of this sermon have not been edited
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*