

Guidance Into the Future

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Matthew 11:28-30; Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Lewinsville Presbyterian Church

July 5, 2020

We are continuing our journey through the book of Genesis today, walking alongside the patriarchs and matriarchs, the ancestors of our faith. They had to make their way, following God as best they could in the nitty-gritty, push-and-shove world of their day, just as we must make ours, in the midst of the various details, challenges, losses, difficulties, and polarizations of our day. What we find in these stories is that their experience was a wondrous mix of the providence of God and the initiative, courage, and risk of humans.

Today's story that Michelle read is about the arrangement of a marriage. Father Abraham sends his servant on a mission to find a wife for his son Isaac. This is not exactly eharmony or match.com. It's a little different from the ways that couples meet in our day. But we can notice the part that this story plays in the larger narrative. The larger narrative, you may recall, has to do with God's promise of blessing for the whole world. God is working that world-wide blessing out through the family and lineage of Abraham. The narrative problem is that Abraham is getting older, the story says he is "advanced in years," and he won't live forever, so there needs to be some sort of succession plan for the generations, and within this narrative, that means that Abraham and Sarah's son, Isaac, must have a wife.

Side comment. What this means is that you could say that this story is not about international geo-politics or the affairs of nations. It's a kind of love story, situated by a well as numerous other stories in the Old and New Testaments, a love story worked out in the details of two families becoming connected. We can read this story to enlarge our imaginations about how God is deeply at work in the most intimate details of our families and personal relationships. But we must bear in mind that this intimate, personal story is itself part of the much larger narrative of God's promise of blessing for the world, *which means* that this intimate, personal story draws right up into, and affects, the affairs of the entire world. When God tells Abraham in chapter 12 that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," that blessing is going to unfold through these intimate, personal relationships. So we should also read this story to enlarge our imaginations about how interconnected we all are, how the most intimate details of your life are drawn right up into, and affect, the affairs of the whole world.

The long story of Genesis 24 - which is the kind of story that you want to pour a cup of coffee and settle in to read and enjoy the conversational details, the pauses, the powers of persuasion going on between the different characters of the narrative - the long story of Genesis 24 has prominent characters in Abraham, Isaac, his kinsmen

Bethuel and Laban, and Rebekah. But the character who makes the action move in this story is the servant. Some speculate that the servant may be Eliezer of Damascus, who is named in chapter 15, but we're not 100% sure of his name. This servant, working with God, provides the leadership that makes things happen in this narrative.

In Matthew 11, Jesus says "Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest." These words really resonate these days. When I talk to people, the words that a lot of people use to describe themselves right now are 'overwhelmed,' 'exhausted,' 'tired,' 'hanging in there.' These are all pretty good synonyms for 'weary.' So if you're ever feeling like that, know that Jesus is speaking to you, when he says, 'Come to me, and I will give you rest.'

But what is fascinating is that Jesus does not say, 'Come to me, and we can take a nap.' Now, we know from other texts that Jesus takes naps, so he doesn't have anything against sleep, but in this text, he promises rest, and then he goes on to talk about his *yoke*. The yoke is an agricultural tool, used to enable oxen to plow land or to pull a load. *The yoke is for work*. If the farmer is careless in fitting the yoke, the work will be hard for the animal. But when the farmer is attentive and fits the yoke to the animal, the work is easier and lighter. Jesus is saying that his calling for us, his work for us, is tailored especially for us, and when we do our work with him and for him, we will not burn out. We will find joy and meaning and even a restfulness in the midst of the work. When work and service are being driven by the Pharaohs of the world, it is going to be draining and depleting. But when service and work are connected to God, we will experience a lightness to them, even when the work is serious.

The servant in Genesis 24 connects his work to God, all the way through the story, and in so doing, he becomes a model for us. He is shown to be a man of prayer, before, during, and all the way through his work. He senses God's presence with him, he has a conversational relationship with God, and he trusts God to be at work. In verse 48, he tells Rebekah's relatives, "I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord, *who has led me by the right way*" to Rebekah. God led the servant. The servant still had to do the work, *he* had to make the journey, *he* had to bring the camels and the gifts, *he* had to negotiate with Bethuel and Laban. There was a lot for him to do. But God was leading him. The servant let God lead him. The servant leaned into the personal yoke of God, and when we embrace the yoke of God, we will always discover blessing.

As we seek to discern and live out God's will in these turbulent, polarized times in which we're living, we need to let God lead us. In the coming weeks and months, as we seek to discern the right ways and the right times for us to re-gather in person as a church, we need to let God lead us. As we make choices and decisions about schooling, traveling, caring for family members, getting together with friends safely in the time of a pandemic, we need to let God lead us. None of these are obvious, easy decisions. We may disagree with each other about the choices we make. We may imagine that decisions weren't easy for Abraham, Sarah, Isaac either. Challenges will come, hardship

and loss will come – there is no promise of a cost-free, pain-free existence here – obstacles will come, but God will lead us, and as we open ourselves to God’s guidance, the blessings of God will flow into and through our lives.

What are the decisions that you are needing to make these days? What is your mission during this time? What is the human need that you feel called to respond to? Like the servant in Genesis 24, you must not imagine that you are on your own in these things. Do not imagine that you have to do it all on your own. God is with you and around you and flowing through you. Lean into the yoke of Christ, which has been fit specially just for you, and know that Jesus is ready to lead you all the way. To God, and to God alone, be all the glory. Amen.