

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A – Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67**  
**St Andrew's Episcopal Church - Sedona, AZ**

***Choosing Faithful Servanthood***

*And they called Rebekah, and said to her,  
“Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will.”*

The last few Sundays we've heard some challenging readings from the Book of Genesis – with the near death of banished Ishmael and Hagar in the wilderness, and the near sacrifice of Isaac on the mountain. Even though the Lord did provide and protect the two sons of Abraham, things were a bit tense there for a while. Even in today's more joyful reading, there is a hint of sadness lingering in the brief mention of Sarah's death, and in the description of Isaac wandering in the field. Perhaps he is contemplating his future role in his family, and considering his responsibility to keep God's covenant for future generations. Perhaps during this liminal time he is experiencing a range of emotions from feeling disorientated after his near sacrifice, to grieving the death of his mother, to sensing excitement about the prospect of his father's servant finding a wife for him. So many life changes in a seemingly short span of time – not only for Isaac, but also for his father.

Abraham has purchased a plot of land for Sarah's burial, and his own resting place. And he is starting to put his affairs in order and make provisions for future generations. This is a time of transition for Abraham and his tribe. A

discernable time of transition toward God's fulfilment of the covenant promise that Abraham and Sarah would be the forbearers of numerous generations. Isaac will soon inherit all of Abraham's possessions, yet the small family and their servants are living as strangers in a strange land and depending on the gracious hospitality of the local people. Abraham has no social or legal standing outside his own clan. But God has promised that Abraham and his multitude of descendants will be given the land of Canaan. That promise is a work-in-progress. Isaac is trying to establish his identity in a land in which he was born but that is not yet his own; a land that is set apart from his father's homeland which he has never known. Abraham and Sarah have raised Isaac to be prayerful and to trust in God's commitment, care, and provision. Isaac's faith will serve him well as he seeks to re-create a sense of family and home, and live into his inherited chosen-ness in God's unfolding plan of salvation history.

Our own chosen-ness, and our own roles and places in God's mission are ongoing as well. Perhaps the passage of time feels most noticeable when we experience life transitions in our families and our faith community. Whether we are moving across the country, or mourning the death of a friend or family member; whether we are reconsidering what retirement looks like or planning college visitations with our eldest child – life transitions have a way

of shedding light on where we have been and what our hopes are for the future. In a multi-generational church such as St. Andrew's, we might identify with the transitions experienced by any one of our sacred ancestors in today's reading. Perhaps you are considering how to share your faith with young people. Perhaps you are contemplating how your gifts and talents will be passed on among your loved ones. Or perhaps you are preparing for how your legacy will continue through future generations in this church. Whatever our hopes and dreams are for the future, thankfully our faith journey is guided by the Holy Spirit – through prayerful discernment, attentiveness to God's guidance, and intentional action toward fulfilling God's will.

This faithful process is modeled for us in today's reading by the unnamed servant who is fulfilling an important task on behalf of his master – not just his obvious master, Abraham; but the master of his destiny, the Divine One who he has come to know through the blessings bestowed upon Abraham's tribe. We don't know if this unnamed servant is the same most trusted steward mentioned when God initially calls Abraham into covenant relationship. But we do know that this servant has grown in relationship with God through the example and witness of Abraham and Sarah. This unnamed servant has been witnessing God's blessings for many decades; he has been shown how to live within God's covenant through prayerful discernment and

intentional action; he recognizes God's enduring loyalty to Abraham and his family and their thankfulness for God's provision. God was with them as they risked leaving their homeland in order to find a new home that God had promised to guide them toward. God gave them the courage and confidence to travel an uncertain path to a new and unfamiliar destination. And now, at one of the most important times of transition for Abraham, he trusts his loyal servant to take on a task of great significance – one that literally influences the birthing of Abraham's descendants and calls for active participation in the fulfillment of God's covenant.

Abraham's devoted and trustworthy servant is likely the man who was previously assumed to be his sole heir – that is until the birth of Ishmael and Isaac. But rather than focusing on his own interests, this unnamed servant continues to be faithful and dedicated to Abraham for over a generation. His witness to God's presence is evident as he takes on this important last request of his master. But this unnamed good and faithful servant is not the only person in this narrative to trust in God's guidance and provision. A woman is about to be called into God's service; a woman whose name will be remembered for a multitude of generations; a woman who becomes the second matriarch to participate in fulfilling God's covenant.

Rebekah is a model of courage and faith. She is wise yet trusting. She is

strong both spiritually and physically – for if we believe even a fraction of the hyperbole surrounding her willingness to water her guests ten camels one water jug at a time – Rebekah is doing a great deal of heavy lifting! And even though most women expect to meet their future husbands near the watering hole, this situation does not initially appear to be one that will lead to marriage. But we all know that appearances can be deceiving and that God moves in mysterious ways.

This encounter is a wonderful example of God’s faithfulness to God’s covenant with God’s people. The servant has barely finished praying that God guide him to successfully fulfill his task when Rebekah appears. She embodies the generous hospitality of her culture and the gracious nature of her upbringing. She recognizes the servant’s faithfulness as akin to her own. And her family reveals their deep relationship with God in offering blessings upon Rebekah after she chooses to live faithfully into God’s covenant. Rebekah says “yes” to God’s call - leaving family and homeland in much the same way that Abraham did. She will become a model of courage, faith, and resilience for future generations; her life will be a testament to God’s commitment to us and God’s involvement in our lives.

The faithful witness of Abraham, the unnamed servant, Rebekah, and her family embolden each of us to step toward the future confident in God’s

guidance, care, and provision. For God's faithfulness is discovered and witnessed anew through every generation -- that all of us may one day thankfully hear God's loving voice proclaim,

"Well done, good and faithful servant."

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