

*Show Me Who You Are* – based on  
Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67  
Aspen Community UMC and Christ Episcopal Church  
July 6, 2008

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Those old, old stories – they always have something for us.  
We know Abraham and Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael, and Isaac.  
And, we have watched them struggle to balance their own  
needs as individuals with what they feel is God's promise to them - and God's future for them.

The stories were not recorded as they were lived,  
no scrapbooks, dairies, or county records,  
to give what we might hope would be the kind of accuracy we now like.  
But they come to us even today with meaning and message beyond accuracy,  
and perhaps with something even more valuable.  
It is like the old saying, "I don't know if it happened or not, but I know it is true."

The stories are reflections of who we are as human beings  
and how we struggle to live faithful lives, sometimes in spite of ourselves.

So, let's go back to the desert where we find a very old Abraham, now a widower.  
Abraham wants Isaac to marry from within his own people, not the Canaanites,  
never the Canaanites.

Abraham directed his servant to find a wife for Isaac. We are not sure of the servant's name.

It has to be someone Abraham trusted completely, to find a wife for his son.

The servant has been in prayer.

He is trusting, hoping he can trust, that a brief conversation with her will reveal who she is.

A specific conversation will take place.

The conversation will go like this: "Please give me a drink of water from your jar to drink."

And she will say, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also."

The servant prays:

"Let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son."

The scene opens at a well – cool water for the master's servant and his camels.

Wells are those places that important conversations take place.

And this conversation begins at a well.

People in other ancient cultures have believed that places where water comes from the earth  
are places of divine-human interaction.

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A lot is at stake here.

Once again, God's promise was close to being lost.

First, it took so many years for Abraham and Sarah to conceive this child.

And now, Isaac has not married and brought children into the world  
to grow this family that was supposed to be.

Then Rebekah appears, and they exchange the words  
that the servant had formed in his mind -  
the words that were to signal that she was the woman whom the Lord had chosen.  
That seemed easy enough. Not all that remarkable.

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What is remarkable is the servant.

So, let's leave the family for awhile and think about the servant.

This is not just any servant. It was a chief servant,  
like a chief of staff sent on a most important mission.

The servant - after meeting Rebekah - what does he do?  
Asks her to declare herself – asks her who she is and what her intentions are.

And she declares who her father is, and her grandmother -  
one of few places where a persons maternal line is described.

What the servant wants to know is...?

What does the servant want to know?

Whether she will deal with his master loyally and truly,  
or whether she will deal with his master disloyally and untruthfully -  
so he may know whether to turn to the left or turn to the right.

This was an idiom meaning "know where to turn."

It translates "know whether to turn right or left."

Satisfied with her answer, he gave her gifts.

I would not consider a fine gold ring for the nose a great gift,  
but remember it is a different time, almost time before time.

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And, the ring and bracelets were honorable gifts.

But, the servant wanted to know,

“Will you deal loyally and truly with my master.

Tell me, and if not, tell me, so that I will know what to do.

Your loyalty, your honesty, your forthrightness, your intentions - are important.

The servant is asking Rebekah to declare – who she is.

And the servant does this twice – once at the well upon meeting.

And the second time is with her family.

For Rebekah takes the servant and his party home to meet her family.

He is trying to assess her true character – whatever it may be.

He is open to her reply. He does not say something like, “You better be loyal, or.....”

No, he just asked her to declare who she is and what she would like to do.

Undoubtedly he is using all of his faculties to perceive the accuracy, veracity,  
and completeness of the response.

Today we would say he is listening to the words as well as watching all the body language.

He would be listening to his intuitive feelings and his rational analysis.

Oh, to have such a questioner to unveil the character of those  
with whom we must deal in today's world.

A world that is full of honest, loyal, truthful, well-meaning people,

but which also is full of scammers, spammers, and outright frauds.

No less than 5,000 years ago in the time of Abraham – and no less today.

Now, if you were to have a servant, wouldn't you want this one?

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But, let's now go back to the family.

I don't want to romanticize their lives,

except to say that their reliance on God is in the fabric of their existence.

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And yet, these families in all their intrigue made it,  
despite their favoritism of one child over another, their plots to control one another,  
kill one another, or their using one another for gain,  
they remain just as they are, and we go back from time to time and visit them,  
and hopefully learn from their mistakes – and hopefully catch ourselves when we do anything  
that resembles some of their dangerous behaviors.

But we also go back and see their courage,  
like Rebekah's courage to leave all the family she knew,  
because she felt God's presence and calling in her life.  
And she and Isaac were partners for the rest of their lives.  
The story is about the changing of generations – and leadership going to the next generation.  
For Isaac becomes Abraham, and Rebekah becomes Sarah.

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But back to the servant.  
We see the courage of the servant, his willingness to ask the good questions.  
He wanted to know,  
will you deal loyally and truly with my master.  
Tell me, and if not, tell me, so that I may go another way.  
In other words, tell me who you are.

Many years later Jesus visits a well,  
meets the woman from Samaria, and offered her living water.  
And in the conversation, they talked about who she was.  
She asked a good question, "Why are you speaking to me, a Samaritan?"  
Good questions get asked at wells.

And the encounter is one of those we hold dear to us -  
for in his reaching out to her, addressing her, being honest with her,  
it invited her to be honest with him. That itself is living water.

The servant would have us learn to ask good questions.

Because good questions help us discern what we are about.

Good questions help us know what is needed.

Good questions guide us, draw us into the future.

Sometimes my own prayer is, "God, give me the right questions."

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A question that comes to mind for me right now is how we,  
our two congregations, can share our faith journey during this time  
and be a blessing to one another?

I don't mean just on a casual basis that accommodates one another.  
But how can we listen to the servant's question, and better define who we are.

And, I am not talking about theological beliefs  
for those encompass a range of personal and shared experience.  
No. How can our sharing of space and fellowship, and occasional worship, and  
what will no doubt be, the unexpected - be touched by the spirit.

May it bring us something neither of us might imagine -  
something that will help us ask better questions about being followers of Jesus today -  
and how to share it with the next generation.

And to close.....imagine a well.

Imagine a well.....and a servant.

Imagine the servant at the well.

Join the servant at the well.

What does the servant ask you?

It will be a question about your life now.

It will be a question that will help you on your path - whatever that path is right now.  
It may have to do with how to deal with an issue in your life that continues to tear you down.

Like the master's servant in the reading -  
it may have to do with who you are and who you want to be in the future.

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But the servant will have a question, and it will be a good one.  
And you will have an answer – even if it is an answer in process.  
So, remember the well out there in the desert, and the servant, and the master.  
Let them be alive as you learn to ask the good questions.