

Finding A Reason To Live
July 6, 2008
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(Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 NRSV) So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. {35} The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. {36} And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. {37} My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; {38} but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.' {42} "I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! {43} I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," {44} and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also"--let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.' {45} "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' {46} She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. {47} Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. {48} Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. {49} Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left." {58} And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." {59} So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. {60} And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes." {61} Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. {62} Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. {63} Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. {64} And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, {65} and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. {66} And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. {67} Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Last week we left off with Abraham and Isaac heading down the mountain in different directions following the Akedah — the binding of Isaac — or you might say, the attempted murder of Isaac by his father.

Abraham went back to Beersheva
Isaac we read is not living at Beersheva but has settled in the Negev.

Sarah has died.

And there has not been any contact between Abraham and his son Isaac.

But it seems from our story that Abraham is keeping an eye on Isaac because he knows that he has not yet married.

Why would Abraham care if Isaac had married or not?

Because Isaac, the one he almost sacrificed, is the child of the promise — the covenant that God has made with Abraham and his decedents.

What would happen if Isaac never married?

Or worse yet

what would happen if Isaac married a foreign woman?

The covenant — the promise might be jeopardized

So Abraham comes up with a rather interesting idea. He decides to find a bride and arrange a marriage for Isaac.

The story of the search for and discovery of a bride for Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah, is one of the most fascinating stories in all of literature. It is, perhaps, the earliest account of an arranged marriage.

But before we get to that tale — I want to look at another story about how marriage may have changed the course of history.

Does anybody remember September 5, 1972?

Let me give you a hint — it was an Olympic year.

It is the date of the worse tragedy in Olympic history.

At the Munich Olympics, Arab terrorists wearing workout sweats scaled the

walls of the Olympic Village, broke into one of the team apartments and seized nine Israeli athletes after killing their wrestling coach and a weight lifter.

The terrorists, from a group called Black September, demanded the release of their comrades who were being held in prison.

But that really wasn't really what their main objective was. Their main objective involved bringing the Palestinian plight and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to the forefront of international attention. Unfortunately, it worked.

Although their comrades were not released from prison, Black September forced the world to take notice of Palestinian grievances. Arafat was eventually invited to address the U.N. General Assembly, and the Palestine Liberation Organization was granted United Nations special observer status.

Suddenly, with objectives met and a worldwide platform secured, Arafat and the PLO had a problem.

They no longer needed a band of young assassins to carry out further acts of terror.

They no longer needed a band of bloodthirsty fighters eagerly willing to die for The Cause.

What were they going to do with all the young men of Black September?

What Arafat did is he ordered his intelligence chief, Abu Iyad to "turn Black September off."

But how in the world do you do that?

How do you transform trained terrorists from being killing machines, hungry for another assignment, to being upstanding Palestinian citizens?

The PLO came up with a rather ingenious plan. But to be honest, it sounds so simple that it is hard to believe that anybody would even think that it might have any hope in working.

The plan almost sounds like a remake of the classic movie *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.

After much debate and struggle this is what they came up with:
Why not marry off all the terrorists?

Why not counter vile-spitting hate with heart-softening love?

Why not give these men -- the fiercest fighters in the PLO -- a reason to live rather than a reason to die?

Who knows, it may sound crazy, but it might just work.

All the other alternatives seemed even riskier, so what did they have to lose?

Arafat's staff traveled to Palestinian refugee camps, to PLO strongholds, to Palestinian neighbors in all the major Middle Eastern cities in search of the most attractive, available young Palestinian women they could find, offering them the once in a lifetime opportunity to serve their country.

Without disclosing any details, the women were asked to accept this mission that had been sanctioned by none other than Chairman Yasser Arafat himself. Who could refuse this call to become true patriots?

About 100 lovely young women agreed to accept and were fetched from their homes across the expanse of the Middle East to Beirut, where they attended what can only be described as a "PLO version of a college mixer." A little mingling. Soft music. Flirty looks from across the dance floor.

Sudden romances evolved into long-term commitments.

Incentives to marry were generous.

Each tough young Black September member and his blushing bride would receive \$3,000 plus bonus gifts including a nonviolent job with the PLO and an apartment in Beirut equipped with gas stove, refrigerator and television.

Each couple adding a baby to the family within a year would be granted an additional \$5,000. Not bad for a band of trained assassins used to living in tents.

Amazingly, every single member of Black September found Ms. Right and married her. And almost every member immediately started a family.

But what about that ingrained thirst for blood?

The intelligence chief and the future brigadier general instituted a plan to periodically test the former terrorists. Occasionally the men were given PLO assignments in Geneva or Paris with genuine passports and nonviolent duties. But without exception, the men refused to accept the international assignments, fearing arrest for past crimes. They had too much to lose now with wives and children at home.

So maybe you might say that the moral of this story is that while hate terrorizes, love can tenderize — even the most hardened heart!

Let's go back to Abraham

Abraham knew that for the promise to happen — for the covenant with God to continue — that Isaac had to have a wife.

Sarah has died — and Isaac in his anger over what Abraham attempted to do to him is nowhere to be seen.

The promise meant something to Abraham — and somehow he needed to get Isaac to find a reason to live and fulfill the covenant.

Unbeknownst to Isaac — Abraham arranges to have one of his servants go and find a wife for Isaac.

But not just any woman would do —

A Canaanite woman would not be fitting for the covenant.

So just like Arafat had searched the Palestinian refugee camps for his “black September” boys — Abraham sends his servant back to Haram — back “home” to find Isaac a wife.

And you have to love the story. The servant decides to go to the local hot spot where all the young unmarried women could be found.

Now we are not talking about “Cheers” or “Charlies Ale House” but he did go to the local watering hole.

The village well!

As the servant was praying to God, seeking success in his endeavor, he casts his eyes on a beautiful girl coming to get water for her family.

It so happened that the words were barely out of his mouth when Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel whose mother was Milcah the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with a water jug on her shoulder. The girl was stunningly beautiful, a pure virgin. She went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came back up. The servant ran to meet her and said, "Please, can I have a sip of water from your jug?"

She said, "Certainly, drink!" And she held the jug so that he could drink. When he had satisfied his thirst she said, "I'll get water for your camels, too, until they've drunk their fill." She promptly emptied her jug into the trough and ran back to the well to fill it, and she kept at it until she had

watered all the camels.

When the camels had finished drinking, the man brought out gifts, a gold nose ring weighing a little over a quarter of an ounce and two arm bracelets weighing about four ounces, and gave them to her. He asked her, "Tell me about your family? Whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father's house for us to stay the night?"

She said, "I'm the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah and Nahor. And there's plenty of room in our house for you to stay—and lots of straw and feed besides.

The servant said, "I'm the servant of Abraham. God has blessed my master — he's a great man; God has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, servants and maidservants, camels and donkeys. And then to top it off, Sarah, my master's wife, gave him a son in her old age and he has passed everything on to his son. My master made me promise, 'Don't get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I live. No, go to my father's home, back to my family, and get a wife for my son there.' I said to my master, 'But what if the woman won't come with me?' He said, 'God before whom I've walked faithfully will send his angel with you and he'll make things work out so that you'll bring back a wife for my son from my family, from the house of my father. Then you'll be free from the oath. If you go to my family and they won't give her to you, you will also be free from the oath.'

Would Rebekah accept the mission this servant proposed?
Incentives certainly caught her attention.

Flocks and herds.

Silver and gold.

Slaves, camels and donkeys.

All this and more would be hers if she accepted this once in-a-lifetime opportunity.

But Rebekah knew very few details.

Sure, this deal offered her a husband plus a signing bonus. But she could not have known that she would become part of the promise — part of the covenant that God made with Abraham.

She would have twin sons. The name of one of those sons would become Israel. Her grandchildren would become the 12 tribes of Israel. She knew none of this, but said "Yes" anyway.

This chapter is one of the Bible's great love stories, but not so much because

of the love of Rebekah for Isaac, or Isaac for Rebekah.

Abraham could see the need for a wife for his son Isaac.

As a result of the trip up the mountain and the death of his mother (Sarah), Isaac was all alone — depressed and in mourning, and without a life's companion, was in desperate need of a reason to live.

And God gave that to him.

Love is one of God's sweet gifts, and by grace it reveals itself in many ways. In marriage we discover God's design for two people to share their lives, to support each other through whatever life may bring them..

When Isaac looked up and saw camels coming, he could not know that what was also coming was his future, his destiny, his great love.

When Rebekah looked up and caught a glimpse of the one she had heard about, she prepared to meet him face to face.

Rebekah was loved.

Isaac was comforted.

And they had both found new reasons to live.

Love overcomes whatever terrorizes us, whether it is loneliness and deep sorrow or self-doubt and bitter regret.

Love gives us a reason to live.