



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

4th Sunday after Trinity ~ July 5th 2020

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

I am continuing to enjoy the services on TV and radio and also from St Albans, Ely & Leicester Cathedrals, and you may have found others.

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

We are resuming some of our Church services with socially distancing, and will maintain, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries; we want people to have a genuine choice.

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am

St John's Sundays 9:30am Tuesdays 10am

Prayers for this Week

Father, Lord of heaven and earth, by whose gracious will the mysteries of the kingdom are revealed to the childlike, make us learn from your Son the humility of heart, that in shouldering his yoke we may find refreshment and rest. We ask this with the Holy Spirit through our Lord Jesus Christ, one God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Lord of heaven and earth whose Son came eating and drinking, exposing the rivalry that tears the world apart: may we share his feast and friendship and lay our burdens in his liberating arms; through Jesus Christ, Wisdom's child. **Amen.**

Reading: Genesis 24 v34-38, 42-49, 58-67

The servant whom Abraham had sent said to Laban, 'I am Abraham's servant. 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. 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. 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; but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son." '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! 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,' 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."

'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." 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. 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. Then I bowed my head and worshipped 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. 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.' And they called Rebekah, and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' She said, 'I will.' So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. 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.' Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, 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. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 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.

Meditation

One of the times when I get to know about people is when I visit a family to arrange a funeral. A question I often ask those who have just lost their partner, out of interest and because of its significance, but also to get people talking, is "How did you first meet?" I think the most common answer is "At a dance." Perhaps that says something about that generation, perhaps it says something about the success of dancing. Other common answers are "at the youth club", "at work", "lived next door" and introduced by a friend or brother or sister, and even rather charmingly, "since schooldays". Curiously I rarely dare to ask a similar question of wedding couples, but suspect some of these reasons would seem rather dated, compared with "on holiday", "on-line", or via an agency. Times change.

Well today's reading seems to be the dating agency of its several thousand years ago era. Isaac gets a wife, but it does not seem to be in a very contemporary way; and indeed, we might get more than slightly uncomfortable if we think about what is going on.

Abraham, Isaac's father seems to be the one calling the shots and making the arrangements, or rather he delegates it to a matchmaking servant. And there seems to be racism (not a Canaanite wife), unseemly boasting of wealth, as well as the more obvious sexism where women seem to be treated as little better than a commodity. There is the rather charming (to me) touch that the desirable woman is the one who cares about animals, until that is spoilt by the realisation that drawing water from a well is back-breaking work that the women are expected to do, whilst the wealthy men spectate.

Also, the seeking out of the woman's pedigree seems to be treating her as breeding stock just like the sheep and goats. Yes, in the end, Rebekah is asked to give her consent, albeit before she even meets Isaac, and we are allowed to discover her real character here and in the subsequent episodes. Yes we are told Isaac loves her (and I

hope this is not just a euphemism for having sex), and that she consoles him after the death of his mother (and I hope this is not just another put down of women), and Isaac is faithful to just one wife (not typical of the biblical patriarchs).

They do not go on to live happily ever after; there are real ups and downs. They struggle to have children, and it seems everyone assumes this is a woman's responsibility. They do go on to have twins, but the twins fall out and the parents have different ones as their favourites. Rebekah's care for Isaac in his blindness and infirmity, as well as her child rearing skills are nothing to write home about. There is deceit, and even treachery and a family feud that drives people apart, as well as much wrestling with God, consciences, and magnanimous reconciliations. It may be set in an era a world away in time and space, but does sometimes echo and highlight contemporary family realities.

We had a diocesan study day this week led by Canon Jessica (you can access it via the cathedral's website) which shared a title with her latest book "Holiness and Desire- What makes us who we are?" In her first session thinking about Scripture as Conversation she gave us (amongst others) these questions; - all good ones generally as well as for today's passage.

- **Which matters more – what a word or sentence used to mean when it was first written, or what it's saying to you now?**
- **Which matters more – the original cultural context or the context it's speaking into?**
- **Which matters more – what Scripture's human writers took for granted, or what we take for granted?**
- **If the point of view it's written from ignores or downplays the life experience of particular groups (eg women) do we just accept that as God's view?**
- **Does it matter if we don't know who wrote something, or if it had multiple authors, or got edited or stitched together from material we haven't got any more?**
- **Does a passage always have the same message over time – even for the same reader? When you go back to a passage, does it change in its gifts to you depending on where you are in your own life?**
- **How significant is your own state of mind when you approach scripture?**

What do I take from Rebekah's and Isaac's story here?

Those who identify as their descendants want to affirm that God was engaged in their lives, always yearning for a future. That God did not eschew the messiness and complications of human lives and relationships, and that we really should not jump to conclusions about God's choices and values, indeed they all too often wrong foot our prejudices and expectations. That God is not so much as above human culture, but wrestling within in it.

And yes, I come with the belief that God himself chose, in a way that indeed wrong footed our prejudices and expectations, to come and dwell amongst us as Jesus, and comes and dwells amongst us in his Spirit now. So I must be prepared to be wrong footed too, to be open to God's surprises, and not to doubt that he is engaged in our lives here and now, and is with us as we step forward into these strange and uncertain times.

The Lord is here, His Spirit is with us.

God bless, Andrew

Prayer

The risen Christ is here in the midst of us. We bring our prayers to him as Lord of the Church.

For the Church universal, of which our buildings are a visible symbol,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For our congregations, as we remember your promise that when two or three are gathered in your name you are in the midst of them,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

That we may be still and know that you are God.

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the fulfilling of our desires and petitions as you see best for us

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For your blessings in the past and for the future.

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the gift of the Holy Spirit and new life in baptism,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the pardon of our sins when we fall short of your glory,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For a foretaste of your eternal kingdom in the sacrament of communion,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the blessing of vows and the crowning of years with your goodness,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the faith of those who have gone before us and for grace to persevere like them,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For our benefactors who have died in the peace of Christ and are at rest,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the sense of fellowship with St John, St Mary, St Peter and St Wendreda and all your Saints,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

O God of living stones, you prepare an everlasting dwelling place for your majesty. Grant that in the power of the Holy Spirit those who serve you may here always be kept within your presence.

This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.