

Dear Friends,

GENESIS 24:1-9

Abraham is about to die. For many years he has been carrying the torch of faith. His faith has sometimes been bright and vibrant. But at other times it has been just a dimly burning wick. It looked as though it could be snuffed out at any moment. His faith is much like yours, sometimes strong and bright, at other times not quite so strong, not quite so bright. And that's okay. God can work with that.

Abraham's faith has been seen in the way that he said "Yes" to God. He said "Yes" to leaving behind his country, his family, his home and to going to a land that he did not know but that God would show him. His faith has also been seen in the way that he has been a blessing to others. It has not always been so. He has done many very damaging things, and those he loved most were those who suffered the most because of him. As he approaches his death you do not need to remind him of his failures. He has not forgotten them. But the messes we make are never the whole story. He has also on many occasions been a blessing to others, doing things for their well-being, so that they flourish, for the growing good of the world. Again, he has been like you, sometimes doing well, sometimes not so well and maybe sometimes quite badly. And that's okay. God can work with that.

But now Abraham is close to death so who will take up the torch of faith? Abraham has carried it together with Sarah, his wife. But she herself has just died. So, what will happen now? Will there be anyone to carry faith into the future? There is Isaac their son. But he's a lonely, solitary sort of person. He's better at reflection than action. His name means laughter and he used to laugh. But he doesn't laugh so much now. I'm not sure when he stopped. Was it when he had that experience with his Dad? Or was it when his Mother died, he has been grieving and suffering because of this loss. He has a heart filled with love. But he's the sort who needs to be helped to share that love with others. Isaac needs a partner, a companion, a soul-friend.

Abraham knows that there's one last thing that he needs to do before he dies. Find that companion for his son. Oh yes, and of course what really matters in the book of Genesis, is that Isaac should have a wife, so that they can have children, so that the seed of Abraham will continue to multiply.

Abraham is not in a position to go travelling himself. The only journey he has left is one that takes him out of this world. So, he sends out a servant to find someone for Isaac. We are not told the name of the servant. But the description here fits the description we get elsewhere of a servant called Eliezer. Abraham trusts him a lot. Before Sarah and Abraham had children, Eliezer was in line to inherit all of Abraham's wealth. Yes, he was a servant, but he seems also to have been a close companion and friend. So, I think the servant in our story is Eliezer.

Abraham sends Eliezer with lots of instructions. He is to go back to the land of Abraham's birth and find a companion from Abraham's family for Isaac. And here's

an important thing. The woman must give her consent. In a culture of arranged marriages the willingness of the woman was sometimes considered to be neither here nor there. But Abraham says that she must be willing. He assumes that she will have the last word. If she's not willing then Eliezer is not obliged to bring her back. Remember that, it must be her choice.

Abraham promises that God will send his angel before Eliezer. At the heart of this story is the confidence that God is working out God's purposes. God is acting to produce something good and beautiful. There is also some discussion about the place of human actions. As the story goes on, Eliezer will make a plan and work out how to put it into practice. Some see that as people working together with God as partners. Others think he complicates things in a way that could threaten God's plan. All that's to come.

For Eliezer his mission is urgent. Abraham is close to death. We learn later that Abraham has already given Isaac all that he has. It was not usual for an inheritance to be passed on until the person had died. That this seems already to have happened suggests that Abraham is very near to the end. Eliezer therefore wants to get the job done and the woman back quickly so that Abraham can have certainty, so that he can see that everything is in hand, that everything will be all right. He wants to have reassurance before he dies.

Eliezer says "Goodbye" to Abraham and hopes that he will see him again. He makes his preparations and sets out on his long journey.

God bless you,

Tony