

Dear Friends,

GENESIS 24: 15-28

Eliezer is hoping to find a bride for Isaac. He is at the well and his plan is to ask a woman who has just drawn water for a drink. If she is willing and without prompting also waters his ten camels, it will be a sign that she is the one for whom he's looking.

A woman appears. She is Rebekah. She takes her jar down the steps that lead to the hole in the ground which is the well. She fills her jar, then comes back up the steps again. Eliezer is anxious. His breathing becomes unsteady. His heart is racing. He runs up to her and says "Please let me sip a little water from your jar". She was certainly already aware of his presence. A person who turns up at the well with ten camels is hardly keeping a low profile. She says "Drink, my Lord". Eliezer's heart leaps. The first item on the criteria is ticked off. But there's the second item. Will she also water his camels? She lowers her jar and pours a drink for him. Perhaps she waits for him to say that he has had enough. While he drinks, he is all the time hoping that she will also water the camels. He can't suggest it. That would ruin the test. But in his heart, he is willing her to do it. When he looks as though he has had enough, she says, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." With these words Rebekah not only meets the criteria she exceeds them. She only needed to give the camels some water. She does more. She agrees to keep giving them water until they finish drinking.

This is a mighty task. Rebekah has one jar. She has to go down the steps, draw the water from the well, then come back up again and empty the jar in the water trough. Then it's back down for another jar full. One camel can drink over 200 pints of water. There are ten camels. She must have been up and down for hours. And she does it all quickly as she does everything quickly. Rebekah shows herself to be kind, generous, and strong. By taking care of the camels, she shows a desire not only to do justice to people, but also to animals, to nature and the creation. As Abraham at his best was a blessing to others, so too is Rebekah.

While she works Eliezer gazes at her in silence in order to find out whether God has made his journey successful. This is perhaps the central point in the story. Is God's hand upon all that is happening? Is the work that God began with Abraham and Sarah going to continue into the future? This is one of the longest stories in Genesis. The story teller knows that time needs to be taken over it. The future depends upon Eliezer and the willingness of a young woman to take on God's project. Even more the future depends upon God working God's purpose out, upon God working together with all things for the growing good of the world.

When the camels at last finish drinking. Eliezer gives Rebekah a very valuable gold nose ring and two even more valuable gold bracelets. Eliezer also asks whose daughter she is. He is relieved to hear that she is family to Abraham, which was what Abraham wanted.

Eliezer asks, "Is there room in your Father's house for us to spend the night?" I like to think of her looking at him quizzically. "Us, spend the night? What are you saying?" He sees that puzzled look and says "No, me and the camels and these men who are with me". We didn't think he could manage a long journey with ten camels by himself did we? But what have these men been doing? Did they help out collecting the water? Or did they just lounge around and watch? You decide.

Eliezer has asked "Is there room in your Father's house?" Rebekah replies, "We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night". Not "My Father"; not "My family"; but "We have provisions and a place". It sounds like she's used to taking responsibility and being part of the decision-making process.

Rebekah runs back to her house and tells everyone everything that has happened. While Eliezer waits and wonders what will happen next.

God bless you,

Tony