

***God will go with you****Jan Hieminga*

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This week has been a week filled with sadness. We were still at the cottage when we were told about the death of Elaine Chu, and shortly after that we heard about Eric, and all of that was overshadowed by the death of our beloved Queen Elizabeth. After a month long quiet and wonderful time at a cottage on Lake Huron we came back to two funerals, and tomorrow we will witness the funeral of her majesty the queen. It was a hard return to reality.

So rather than finding a story that fits with funerals and sadness I thought we could look at a happy story for today

When we have people over at our house and they are married we often ask them, "How did the two of you meet?" And I find it fascinating to hear how people have found each other, before they got married. We hear the most interesting stories. After they have told their a story, they often ask us. "How did the two of you meet?" And depending on who tells story they get two different versions of how Lynne and I met. If I tell the story I tell them that the girls from the prairies who are looking for a boyfriend often come to the big city and watch the planes come in from overseas. They look for new immigrants who are single and then they follow

them around until they catch them. That is what happened to me. Lynne tells the story a bit different. She tells how she had broken up with her boyfriend in Saskatchewan and had come to Toronto to get away from it all. She will say that the last thing she wanted was another relationship.

Lynne and I met when we happened to sit beside each other in an orientation course for new staff at the ministry of health, where we both had got a job in different departments. It was a week long course and at the end of the week, I asked her to go out with me. But she said no. She had made up some excuse that seemed rather lame to me. When I asked for her address and phone number, so that we could keep in touch, she did not want to give me that either. It was clear that she was not interested in going out with me. But i did some research and found out where she lived. I remembered that she had told me that she liked classical music and that she had bought tickets for the Toronto Symphony . So I went and bought a ticket to the concert, and I just happened to see her there. We met a few more times, all purely accidental, and after a few weeks she asked me at work one day if I still wanted to have her address. Now I said no. I did not give her an explanation. Now she was disappointed. It was clear that she wanted me to have it. So i confessed that I already knew where she lived because I had followed her home one night. That is her story and I am sticking with mine. That was over 50 years ago.

Today we have read another story about how a man met his future wife. It is the story of how Isaac met Rebecca. It is very different from how Lynne and I met and it is very different from the way we expect most of you have met. When Lynne and I got married I had met her parents once and she had never met my parents.

Our parents had very little to do with us meeting each other and getting married. But in the story of how Isaac and Rebecca met and got married it is the entire opposite. Here it seems that the parents have everything to do with how they met, and Isaac and Rebecca have virtually nothing to do with it. Let's see what happened.

It was quiet in the house of Abraham and Isaac. The memories of the death of Sarah were still too fresh in their minds. Both Abraham and his son Isaac were still mourning Sarah's death. Abraham had left most of the work looking after the animals to his servant Eliezer.

Isaac spent a lot of time by himself wandering in the fields. His mother had told him over and over again how special he was and that he was a gift from God. She had told him that she had given up believing that she would have a son. She was simply too old. She knew that God had promised Abraham, her husband, that his descendants were going to be like the sand by the sea and like the stars in the sky, but as she got older she had given up.

She thought that they must have misunderstood God. She was well past her time of having babies. But the miracle had happened. Isaac was born in her old age. She had been so happy to have him. But now she is gone. Abraham his father had purchased a piece of land near Mamre which included a cave, and there they had buried Sarah. Now everything was so different without her.

Abraham knew that his life was coming to an end too. He knew that he soon would follow his wife Sarah. His mind took him back to when he was young and lived in Haran. There he had left his family and friends behind, because God had told him that he was to go to the land that God would show him.

His family had advised him against it. Why would you want to do that? But he had followed God's orders and he had made the long journey with his family and all his belongings and they had reached the land of Canaan.

Much had happened in the years since that. But God had promised to bless him and to be with him, and he had. Now the time had come close that he had to give his son Isaac the blessing of the firstborn. Isaac would inherit everything he owned. But before that, there was one more thing he had to do. There was one more thing he was concerned about. Isaac was still single and Abraham was worried about that.

Not that he was concerned that Isaac would not be able to find a wife, but what kind of wife would it be. If he took a wife from around there, she would not believe in the God he and Isaac believed in. He wanted to make sure that Isaac got a wife who was one of them, who believed in their God and not in the idols he saw all around him. He wanted to make sure that this would not happen. He wanted nothing more than that his son had a wife who believed in God. A wife he would be happy with and who he could share his life with. But how would he make sure that that would happen? How could he make sure that Isaac got the right wife?

I would have expected that the next thing in the story would be that Abraham and Isaac had a conversation. I thought that they would have a frank man to man, father to son discussion about what to look for in a wife. I expected that Abraham would have expressed his concerns to Isaac and that Isaac would have said, "Don't worry dad, I have it under control. I will make sure that I will select the right wife for me. You do not need to worry." That is what my kids would have said. But that is not how the story goes.

Instead of Abraham having a discussion with Isaac, he has a discussion with Eliezer, his trusted servant.

He says, “Eliezer, I want you to promise me something. In fact I want you to swear that you will do something for me. Pretty soon I am not going to be here any more and I want you to make sure that Isaac does not get himself a wife from the women around here. Instead I want you to go back to Haran where I used to live when I was young and where I still have family and friends.

I want you to get a wife for Isaac from there, Eliezer.”

Now Eliezer had always done what his master asked him and Abraham had trusted him with everything, but this was different. He, a servant, getting a wife for Isaac? What if he could not find the right wife for Isaac? What if she would not want to come with him? After all, that was no small thing to ask of a woman.

To leave her family and friends to come with someone she did not know, to marry a man she had never met. What was the chance that someone would say yes to that?

Eliezer expresses his concerns to Abraham and Abraham says, “You are forgetting one thing. You are forgetting that you are not going alone. God will go with you and He will send an angel ahead of you and make your trip successful. I have trusted God all my life Eliezer, would I stop trusting him now? And if it is not God’s will to find a wife for Isaac then you will be released from your oath.”

Eliezer knew that Abraham was right. He would not go alone. God would be with him. Abraham would be praying for him every day he was on his journey. Eliezer knew that he had to trust God and he did. He prepared for the long journey to Haran.

He took ten camels, enough for a dowry, and gold and jewelry for the bride and the family.

He was on his way, praying that God would lead him and that God would keep him safe and that God would make his trip successful.

And what about Isaac? Did he know what was going on? The bible does not say anything about that. But I am sure that Isaac knew. I am sure that Abraham had told him what he had done and that Eliezer was on his way to find a wife for him.

If I had told my sons that I had sent someone on a mission to find them a wife, they would have said, "You have done what? I will look for a wife myself, thank you very much!" But It does not say that about Isaac. He did not object.

We have good friends who have told us that their marriage had been arranged by their parents. And when I asked the husband how he felt about that, he said he trusted his parents. Isaac trusted his father. He trusted that his father would do what was good for him. I am sure that Isaac was excited and that he was praying for a safe return and for a successful trip. Isaac trusted his father Abraham, and Abraham trusted God.

In the meantime Eliezer is on his way. It was a long journey. He went the same way his master Abraham had gone a long time ago, only in the opposite direction. As he came closer to Haran, he was still not sure what he would do when he got there. It was evening when he reached the town of Nahor. He stopped the camels outside the town where the well was. They had had a long trip and the camels deserved a rest. The evening was the time when the women of the town would come to get their supply of water for the day. And this day was no different.

As soon as the camels laid down he could see the women coming towards the well. What would he do now? The bible says that he went down on his knees and prayed to God "*O lord God of my*

*father Abraham, give me success to day and show kindness to my master Abraham. See I am standing beside the spring and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, "Please let down your jar that I may have a drink", and she says, "Drink and I'll water your camels too" , let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."*

Eliezer knew that he was to select a wife for Isaac but he did not know how. So he said. "Lord, I don't know how to do this, will you please select a wife for Isaac for me? You know everything Lord. You have already selected someone. Please let me know who it is. Please let it be the one who, when I ask for some water, offers to water the camels too."

Do you pray to God when you don't know what to do? Do you ask for God's help when you don't know what to do next? Eliezer did. Before he had finished praying the girls from the town have arrived at the well. Rebecca is the first one to arrive. She is carrying a water jar on her shoulder. And with a trembling voice Eliezer asks her for some water. He says, "Please give me a little water from your jar". She bends down and hands him the jar and gives him a drink and as soon as he has had a drink she says, "I'll draw water for the camels too." And she goes down to the well to get water and puts it in the trough for the camels to drink.

Eliezer can not believe it. God has answered his prayer. It has gone exactly as he had asked for. Now he knows for sure that she is the one God had wanted him to find. She is the one chosen by God himself. He has to find out who she is and he has to meet her father and family and ask her if she is willing to come with him on the long journey home. He reaches in his bag and takes out a beautiful golden ring and two gold bracelets. And he asks her, "Who are you?" She tells him that she is Rebecca the daughter of

Bethue, the granddaughter of Nahor the brother of Abraham. She is family. Her grandfather and Isaac's father are brothers.

I imagine that Rebecca by now must have guessed that something was up. She must have guessed that this stranger had come here for a reason. You don't give someone solid gold jewelry to thank them for a drink of water. Rebecca invites him to come to their home and meet her family. She leaves Eliezer by the well and she is off to tell her parents that they will have company.

And Eliezer? He bows down and worships the Lord. God had answered his prayer and he does not forget to thank God for it. Don't we often ask God for something and then when God answers our prayers we forget to thank God for it? Eliezer says *"Praise be to the Lord the God of my master Abraham who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives."* That was the prayer of Eliezer.

In the meantime Rebecca ran home to tell her parents that they would have a guest that night. She tells them what happened at the well. And she shows them the ring and the bracelets he had given her. Her brother Laban saw the jewelry and thinks, "This must be a wealthy guest. I better go out to meet him."

And he is off. By the well he finds Eliezer standing by the camels. He says, "Come, you who are blessed by the Lord. Come, I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." Eliezer follows him to the house of Rebecca's family. There preparations are underway in honour of the guest.

But Eliezer can not wait to tell them what he is there for. He has to find out if Rebecca and her parents will agree that she come with him to marry Isaac. He tells them who he is and why he is there.



He tells them the whole story. When Bethuel and Laban, Rebecca's father and brother, heard this, they said "This is from the Lord." It was God who had led Eliezer all the way. God had lined it all up and God had answered the prayers of Abraham and Eliezer. This was from the Lord. They were sure of it. They agree to let Rebecca go and become the wife of Isaac.

What about Rebecca? Did she have anything to say about this? Apparently not. Eliezer brings out his gifts and the deal is made. The parents agreed and that is all that was needed. Now all they have to decide is when she will come. Rebecca's mother wants to have ten days to say good bye to her daughter who she may never see again. But the next day Eliezer says, "Please let us go right away. I want to get back. They decide to let Rebecca make the decision and she agrees that she will go with Eliezer.

They start the long journey back and when they get closer Isaac is out in the field. It says that he was meditating. What was going through his mind? His mother's death? Eliezer's journey to find him a wife? Was he praying to God that God would make the journey successful? I am sure it was all of that.

Rebecca sees him from a distance. She asks Eliezer who this man is and he tells her that it is Isaac. She covers her head so he will not see her until they are married. Eliezer tells Isaac all that had happened and arrangements are made for the wedding. They get married in the tent of Sarah, Isaac's mother.

The story of how Isaac and Rebecca met is, I imagine, very different from the way most of us meet our partners. A man from India, whose marriage had been arranged by his parents, once said, "In the west you marry the girl you love and in the east we love the girl we marry."

How you meet is not what is important. What is important is that God is part of it. What is important is that God is part of it when you meet each other for the first time and that God is part of it all through your married life. Abraham prayed that God would find a wife for his son and that God would go with Eliezer on his journey. Eliezer prayed that God would lead him and he prayed to God to show him what to do along the way. And Isaac was praying in the field when he first met Rebecca.

We are all on journey through life. For some of us the journey seems easy and for some of us the journey is hard. But the story of this morning tells us that wherever our journey takes us, in sad times and in happy times, God will go with us. He will be there every step along the way. Wherever we find ourselves on our journey, God is right beside us.

There is a beautiful hymn we often sing with our seniors. It is called "in the garden." It says *and He walks with us and He talks with us and he tells us we are His own*. Wherever your journey leads you, remember God walks with you and talks with you and he tells you that you are his own. That way when we look back at our lives we can say wherever our journey took us God was in it. He was right beside us.