

“Let Me Water Your Camels As Well”

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

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The lectionary has been walking us through the early stories of Abraham and Sarah in the Book of Genesis. These are among my favorite Bible narratives! Last week, we learned of the birth of Isaac, child of laughter. This week we find Isaac has reached the age for marrying but hasn't found a bride. He may be on the shy side; we don't know. Nowadays, his parents would urge him to register with Match Dot Com. But in those days, Abraham and Sarah addressed their concern by sending their most trusted servant back to the home village to find a wife for their son.

As the servant approaches the home village, armed with gifts of livestock for the bride-to-be's parents, he kneels at the village well to pray. He prays God will lead him to the right person for his master's son. Finishing his prayer, he stands up and sees a young woman walking toward the well. She is carrying a pottery jug for carrying water. The servant notes this and says to himself: this is good; she is willing to work hard! As she draws water from the well, she offers the servant a cool drink. Though he is a total stranger, she takes mercy on him and offers him some refreshment. The servant notes this and says to himself: she is kind, even to a stranger. And then, the young woman, Rebecca by name, offers to water his camels as well! The servant hears this offer and is beside himself with joy! He has never witnessed such a generous heart! 'She'll water my camels as well?' There can be no doubt that this is the woman God has in mind for Isaac. It's her extraordinary generosity that sets her apart.

Since that day at the village well, the sign of a generous heart is the offer to water the visitor's camels. If someone says to you, 'And let me water your camels as well,' you'll know you are in the presence of extravagant generosity.

The Rebeccas of this world inspire us. They go beyond what is normally expected. I hope you all know a Rebecca. Perhaps you ARE Rebecca!

On our recent Middle School mission trip to Boston, I noticed I had been losing weight. Rather than buy a new belt of a smaller size, I tried carving an extra hole into my belt, but the tool I had didn't work too well and the resulting puncture looked rather amateurish. So, I kept my eye out for a leather shop. Just down the street from the Braintree Congregational Church where we were sleeping, I happened upon a shoe repair shop. I peered in through the window and spied an elderly couple chatting. I took a deep breath and walked inside. I explained my dilemma. The older gentleman, wearing a well-soiled apron, asked for my belt. With the greatest of ease, he cleaned up the mess I had made with the one hole, then, without being asked, punched three more through the leather in perfect alignment. I felt like the servant meeting Rebecca at the well! I was blown away by his generosity! I offered to pay him. He laughed; told me to have a good day. I departed hoping for a chance to be as generous as the shoe repair couple had been with me.

This theme of a generous heart always carries me to the wedding in Cana of Galilee where Jesus and his mother, Mary, and some of the disciples were invited guests. At the wedding reception, the appetizers were a big hit, but the wine had run out! This would be a terrible embarrassment to the bride and groom. Mary notices this predicament and elbows her son to step up and do something to rescue the situation. Jesus hesitates to get involved, but Mary persists. "Do something."

He instructs the servants to fill some barrels with water and to bring some of the liquid to the steward of the feast. This they do straight away. And when the steward tastes the water now turned to wine, he smiles from ear to ear, and proclaims, “This is the best wine I’ve ever tasted! And look! Six barrels of it! Most people serve the good wine first, then bring out the cheap stuff later. But this bride and broom have saved the best for now!”

I’m drawn to this story not because of the wine. I’m no connoisseur of fine wine. I’m drawn to this story because of the generous heart Mary awakens in her son. I think Jesus doesn’t yet know that he has a generous heart. But his mother knows. I suppose he could have run to the local package store and bought a buy-one-get-one-free six pack of Apple Dapple wine, but he lets his generous heart take over. What the steward of the feast tastes is the best wine anyone has ever sipped, and there are 6 barrels of it! I know that wine has been the ruin of many a life, but a generous heart is always a blessing. It’s the generous heart I am raising up this morning!

The story of the wedding at Cana ends with these words: Jesus did this, the first of his miracles. What I believe is that a generous heart is the fertile soil from which miracles arise.

We don’t know how many camels the servant of Abraham and Sarah had in tow. It may have been two; it may have been twenty. What mattered was Rebecca’s generous heart. Many of you know Tommy French. He used to work down here at Richard’s Service Station, back in the old days when it was the Mobile station. When a customer would pull up for gas, Tommy would be out at the pump before you could get your credit card out of your wallet. He’d then size up the air pressure in your tires. And before you knew what was happening, he’d have washed the windshield and maybe the side windows as well.

He has moved on to other pursuits now, but he has carried his generous heart with him. He is one of many in South Glastonbury, who, by his spontaneous deeds of kindness, announces, “Let me water your camels as well.”

On the Fourth of July, I walked through Old Church Cemetery. In that hallowed ground, I visited Corporal Elizabeth Palatine. I stopped and read Marc Feldmann’s faith statement. I read Hugh Ogden’s poem. Then, I let my imagination take over. What would be on my stone? What will be inscribed on my children’s stones? If we were to locate Rebecca’s stone, it might well say: “Let me water your camels as well.” It would be a wonderful way to be remembered, as one who had a generous heart. Rebecca is one of the Biblical characters who keeps me living in the greatest of hope. Amen.