

Trusting God's timing is best

Loving God, help us to hear You speaking into our hearts this day so that Your love might help us live the abundant life You have promised. And assist us we pray – that the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts are pleasing to You – our Healer, our Liberator, our Redeemer. AMEN.

Over the past several weeks, we have been learning from the very human journey of one of the heroes of the faith found in the Old Testament – Abraham. We have explored a few episodes in his life that caused him to adjust his direction to ensure he was indeed travelling the path laid out for him by God.

Our first encounter was his initial call from God. At the time Abram was 75 years old – far beyond the age where most people would have been adventurous enough to leave everything behind and start again in a new place – in a foreign land.

Abram could have stayed put – he was already living a good life but didn't have the one thing he desired most legacy. Without an heir . . . he had no one to inherit or take care of Sarai, his wife.

So, Abram took a chance on God. He decided to trust God with the promise that he would indeed become a father – that he would somehow have an heir.

The next time we encounter Abram – he is 99 years old. God has just reaffirmed the promise resulting in a name change. No longer is he Abram he is now Abraham – the one who was to become the father of a great nation.

But much as happened in the 24 years Abraham has been in the new land – he has indeed become a parent just not with Sarah. Their lack of trust – their lack of faith in the promise due to length of time they had been waiting had caused them to choose another way. Abraham became a parent with Hagar.

Sarah's jealousy Sarah's fear – caused her to treat Hagar so badly that Hagar fled while pregnant only to return for the birth of Abraham's first son – Ishmael – when Abraham was still Abram at the age of 86.

For 13 years – Ishmael was the only heir. Then the miracle happens – Sarah conceives and gives birth to Isaac. And once again Sarah's fear compelled her to demand that Hagar and Ishmael be banished – expelled from the family – when Isaac was still a toddler.

Sarah thought with Ishmael out of the way – she would be safe. With Isaac the sole heir Isaac would become the head of the household able to ensure she was taken care of for life.

Yet, this unhealthy focus on Isaac causes God to step in again – for Abraham had become fixated on Isaac in his old age. He had replaced God with his son – Isaac was the object where all his energy went.

So probably when Abraham was 115 years old – when Isaac was a young man – God tested Abraham telling him to sacrifice his son the most valuable thing in his life in order to get right with God.

Of course, God provided a way out God provided a way for Isaac to not only survive but thrive.

Every time that Abraham and Sarah decided to take matters into their own hands – decide on the timing of things God needed to step in!

But it doesn't stop with them. In this week's passage from Genesis, we see a similar pattern with Isaac. In fact, the similarities to his father's life are shocking.

Isaac is well beyond the typical age for marriage when he marries Rebekah. Isaac is 40 years old – well beyond his prime and well beyond the typical human timing of marriage at the time.

And similar to his parents' journey – Isaac and Rebekah are childless. After 20 years of marriage there is no one to follow Isaac no one to continue the line no one to carry on the legacy.

And again, similar to the previous generation – God answers the cry for an heir in a very unexpected way. Rebekah gives birth to twins – Esau and Jacob.

And here is where things get a bit weird – at least for me.

For you see, I am a twin. And while growing up my brother and I certainly had our fair share of fights and disputes – we always had each other's back. And as adults we became best friends.

So, the idea that one brother would use the weakness of the other brother for personal gain seems almost unimaginable to me. When a request for food becomes transactional – it seems bizarre – the older brother asks:

“Let me eat some of that red stuff for I am famished. . . . [And the younger brother replies] “First sell me your birthright.” (Genesis 25:30,31)

This exchange seems ridiculous to me. After all, the older brother – Esau – is a hunter; an outdoor adventurer the one who brings food to the family. And even though, the younger brother – Jacob – is more of a homebody – the one who cooks the food I doubt he is that good of a chef!

Yet, Esau is so hungry he declares:

“I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” (Genesis 25:32)

Esau is willing to give up his birthright for a meal. Was he really that hungry – was he really starving close to death?

Or was there something else going on here? Esau was Isaac's favourite. Jacob was Rebekah's favourite. Was there that much sibling rivalry – that Jacob was willing for his brother to die? Or did Esau not want the responsibility that came with being the older brother – the heir?

The fact that each parent had a favourite – did that play into the rivalry? Did that play into the path that each son took in life?

We will never know . . . however, the end-result is that Esau gets the meal and Jacob gets the birthright. Yet, God doesn't reject either brother as both brothers become parts of great nations – Esau with the nation of Edom and Jacob with the nation of Israel.

And as wild as this episode seems to be regarding the way twin brothers treat each other – when it is combined with the strange episodes in Abraham's life, I believe we are able to see something significant about God.

God's ways are not our ways. God's timing is certainly not our timing. Yet, God has a way of working with our impatience; working with our poor judgment; working with our humanness – that allows God to move around the obstacles and barriers we create – so that God's plan is achieved.

Abraham started by trusting God . . . then stopped trusting God . . . then returned to trusting God. Over a period of 40 years or more – God worked with Abraham to ensure that the promise was fulfilled.

Isaac started by trusting God . . . then doubted God . . . then thought he knew better than God. Over a period of probably another 40 years – God worked with Isaac to ensure that the promise was fulfilled.

For God's promise was that the descendants of Abraham would become a great nation. In reality – it was just one great nation. Sure, we typically focus on the nation of Israel – coming from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – but there were also the nations that came from Ishmael and Esau.

Thankfully, God never gave up on the promise. God worked to ensure the promise could be fulfilled. And the abundance of God overflowed to allow those pushed aside by human frailty to flourish as well.

When Jesus told his disciples the parable about the Sower – I wonder how much seed actually lands on the path, the rocky ground, in amongst the thorns, and on good soil?

Traditionally, we are told that our goal is to be good soil – so that the seed of God’s love can reproduce and spread in us and the world.

But what if . . . the parable is describing the journey to become good soil? For it seems to me that even good soil needs to be constantly tended to in order to remain good soil.

If it is allowed to be trampled on – it will become like the path. If it has not been tended to at all – it will become like the rocky ground. If it is left on its own and neglected – it will become like the thorny ground.

Abraham needed to get off the path he was on – he needed to move to new ground in order to experience God.

Isaac needed to tend to the thorns of his mistrust and doubt – so that he could see how the promise would be fulfilled.

Jacob needed to remove the rocks of jealousy and greed – so that he could accept the blessings God had in store for him.

All of us have times when our lives might be like the worn path – we are so tired; so used up . . . that we need to break free by moving into new ground . . . trying something new in order for our soil to become soft again.

All of us have times when our lives might be filled with rocks and obstacles – we are so distracted by the challenges before us that we have no time to listen; no time to experience the God of love who wants us to focus on the right things.

All of us have times when our lives might be filled with too many obligations – there is too much on our plates; there is not enough time in the day . . . so we simply struggle to survive instead of moving into a space where we might thrive.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – deemed to be the ancestors of our faith – were all very human. They all struggled with doubt, they all struggled with choosing shortcuts, they all struggled with waiting on God’s timing.

And just so we are clear – none of them would have any mention in history without Sarah and Rebekah. They were just as important to God’s plan and just as human too. They struggled with doubt, choosing shortcuts, and waiting on God’s timing – which seems to make it a common theme with humanity.

Thankfully, just like Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob though – God never gives up on us. God takes the time needed to make us into good soil . . . over and over again.

And even when we are surrounded by rocks or feel choked by thorns – God is the good gardener who is working alongside us to clean up the soil while carefully, tenderly caring for us.

For it is God’s love that provides all the nutrients needed for our soil to spring forth with life – a life filled with the food the world needs.

May our soil be filled with God’s love – allowing us to share it with those around us making more good soil as we go.

AMEN.