

“A REASON TO LIVE”

A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF GENESIS (24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON JULY 5, 2020- ----(THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF A SIX WEEK SERMON SERIES THAT WILL TAKE US THROUGH SOME OF THE MAJOR THEMES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS)

THE STORY OF THE SEARCH FOR AND DISCOVERY OF A BRIDE FOR ISAAC, SON OF ABRAHAM AND SARAH, IS ONE OF THE MOST FASCINATING STORIES IN ALL OF LITERATURE. IT IS, PERHAPS, NOT ONLY IS THE EARLIEST ACCOUNT OF AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE, BUT IT IS ALSO A TOUCHING ACCOUNT OF HOW GOD PROVIDENTIALLY BROUGHT ISAAC AND REBEKAH TOGETHER.

BUT BEFORE WE TELL THAT STORY, LET'S GO TO A CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNT OF HOW MARRIAGE CHANGED THE COURSE OF HISTORY. THE TWO STORIES ARE VASTLY DIFFERENT -- AND THEREIN LIE SOME IMPORTANT LESSONS -- BUT EQUALLY POWERFUL.

MANY WILL SAY THAT WE ARE LIVING IN WHAT ONE MIGHT CALL "DARK TIMES" ---- A GLOBAL PANDEMIC WITH HORRIFIC IMPACT UPON THE ENTIRE WORLD COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL AND RACIAL UNREST IN OUR VERY OWN COUNTRY....OUR VERY OWN STATEOUR VERY OWN COMMUNITIES.....

THESE ARE INDEED TRYING TIMES-----

CHALLENGING TIMES TO BE SURE....

THIS MORNING WE PAUSE TO REVISIT ANOTHER

DARK TIME IN HISTORY ---- A TIME THAT MANY

OF US LIVED THROUGH AND REMEMBER.....

IT WAS ABOUT 48 YEARS AGO -----SEPTEMBER 5,

1972 TO BE EXACT----- WHEN THE WORST

TRAGEDY IN OLYMPIC HISTORY JOLTED THE

WORLD..... AT THE MUNICH OLYMPICS, ARAB

TERRORISTS WEARING WORKOUT SWEATS

SCALED THE WALLS OF THE OLYMPIC VILLAGE,

**BROKE INTO ONE OF THE TEAM APARTMENTS
AND SEIZED NINE ISRAELI ATHLETES AFTER
KILLING THEIR WRESTLING COACH AND A
WEIGHT LIFTER..... THE TERRORISTS, FROM A
GROUP CALLED BLACK SEPTEMBER, DEMANDED
THE RELEASE OF THEIR COMRADES IN PRISON,
BUT THEIR MAIN INTENT INVOLVED BRINGING
THE PALESTINIAN PLIGHT AND PALESTINIAN
LEADER YASSER ARAFAT TO THE FOREFRONT
OF INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION.**

GUESS WHAT.....IT WORKED!!!!

**ALTHOUGH THEIR COMRADES WERE NOT
RELEASED FROM PRISON, BLACK SEPTEMBER
FORCED THE WORLD TO TAKE NOTICE OF
PALESTINIAN GRIEVANCES..... ARAFAT WAS
EVENTUALLY INVITED TO ADDRESS THE U.N.
GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AND THE PALESTINE
LIBERATION ORGANIZATION WAS GRANTED
UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL OBSERVER STATUS.**

**SUDDENLY, WITH OBJECTIVES MET AND A
WORLDWIDE PLATFORM SECURED, ARAFAT AND
THE PLO HAD A PROBLEM. THEY NO LONGER
NEEDED YOUNG ASSASSINS TO CARRY OUT
FURTHER ACTS OF TERROR.**

THEY NO LONGER NEEDED A BAND OF
BLOODTHIRSTY FIGHTERS EAGERLY WILLING TO
DIE FOR THE CAUSE. ..**WHAT WERE THEY GOING**
TO DO WITH ALL THE YOUNG MEN OF BLACK
SEPTEMBER?

ARAFAT ORDERED HIS INTELLIGENCE CHIEF, A
MAN NAMED ABU IYAD, TO "TURN BLACK
SEPTEMBER OFF," BUT HOW DO YOU
TRANSFORM TRAINED TERRORISTS FROM BEING
KILLING MACHINES, HUNGRY FOR ANOTHER
ASSIGNMENT, TO BEING UPSTANDING
PALESTINIAN CITIZENS? ----- BY THE WAY AND
AS AN ASIDE.....THIS DILEMMA IS NOT UNIQUE....

**THE UNITED STATES HAD A SIMILAR PROBLEM
WHEN OUR NAVY SEALS RETURNED HOME
FROM VIETNAMUNIQUELY TRAINED AS NO
OTHER FIGHTING/COMMANDO FORCE AND NOW
HOME WITH --- IN MANY CASES ----SEETHING
ANGER AND RESENTMENT AND A HAIRPIN
TRIGGER.....OFTEN A RECIPE FOR TRAGEDY....**

**WELL----ABU IYAD PASSED THIS ARDUOUS
ASSIGNMENT ON TO ONE OF HIS DEPUTIES, AND
THAT UNNAMED MAN -- NOW A BRIGADIER
GENERAL IN THE PLO -- CAME UP WITH AN
INGENIOUS PLAN.**

**WHAT HAPPENED NEXT SOUNDS LIKE A SEMITIC
REMAKE OF THE CLASSIC MOVIE SEVEN BRIDES
FOR SEVEN BROTHERS..... THE INTELLIGENCE
CHIEF AND HIS DEPUTY BRAINSTORMED ALL
THE POSSIBILITIES AND CAME UP WITH THIS
RIDICULOUS IDEA: WHY NOT MARRY OFF ALL
THE TERRORISTS? WHY NOT COUNTER VILE-
SPITTING HATE WITH HEART-SOFTENING LOVE?
WHY NOT GIVE THESE MEN -- THE FIERCEST
FIGHTERS IN THE PLO -- A REASON TO LIVE
RATHER THAN A REASON TO DIE? JUST MAYBE
IT COULD WORK! -----ALL OTHER ALTERNATIVES
SEEMED EVEN RISKIER.**

ARAFAT'S STAFF TRAVELED TO PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS, TO PLO STRONGHOLDS, TO PALESTINIAN NEIGHBORS IN ALL THE MAJOR MIDDLE EASTERN CITIES IN SEARCH OF THE MOST ATTRACTIVE, AVAILABLE YOUNG PALESTINIAN WOMEN THEY COULD FIND, OFFERING THEM THE ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE THEIR COUNTRY. WITHOUT DISCLOSING ANY DETAILS, THE WOMEN WERE ASKED TO ACCEPT THIS MISSION THAT HAD BEEN SANCTIONED BY NONE OTHER THAN CHAIRMAN YASSER ARAFAT HIMSELF. WHO COULD REFUSE THIS CALL TO BECOME TRUE PATRIOTS?

ABOUT 100 LOVELY YOUNG WOMEN AGREED TO ACCEPT AND WERE FETCHED FROM THEIR HOMES ACROSS THE EXPANSE OF THE MIDDLE EAST TO BEIRUT, WHERE THEY ATTENDED WHAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS A "PLO VERSION OF A COLLEGE MIXER." A LITTLE MINGLING. SOFT MUSIC. FLIRTY LOOKS FROM ACROSS THE DANCE FLOOR.

SUDDEN ROMANCES EVOLVED INTO LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS.... INCENTIVES TO MARRY WERE GENEROUS..... EACH TOUGH YOUNG BLACK SEPTEMBER MEMBER AND HIS BLUSHING BRIDE WOULD RECEIVE \$3,000 PLUS BONUS GIFTS INCLUDING A NONVIOLENT JOB WITH THE PLO

**AND AN APARTMENT IN BEIRUT EQUIPPED WITH
GAS STOVE, REFRIGERATOR AND TELEVISION.
EACH COUPLE ADDING A BABY TO THE FAMILY
WITHIN A YEAR WOULD BE GRANTED AN
ADDITIONAL \$5,000..... *NOT BAD FOR A BAND OF
TRAINED ASSASSINS USED TO LIVING IN TENTS.***

**AMAZINGLY, EVERY SINGLE MEMBER OF BLACK
SEPTEMBER FOUND MS. RIGHT AND MARRIED
HER. AND ALMOST EVERY MEMBER
IMMEDIATELY STARTED A FAMILY.**

BUT WHAT ABOUT THAT INGRAINED THIRST FOR BLOOD? THE INTELLIGENCE CHIEF AND THE FUTURE BRIGADIER GENERAL INSTITUTED A PLAN TO PERIODICALLY TEST THE FORMER TERRORISTS..... OCCASIONALLY THE MEN WERE GIVEN PLO ASSIGNMENTS IN GENEVA OR PARIS WITH GENUINE PASSPORTS AND NONVIOLENT DUTIES..... BUT WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THE MEN REFUSED TO ACCEPT THE INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS, FEARING ARREST FOR PAST CRIMES..... THEY HAD TOO MUCH TO LOSE NOW WITH WIVES AND CHILDREN AT HOME.

SO, THE MORAL OF THIS STORY IS THAT WHILE HATE TERRORIZES, LOVE TENDERIZES -- EVEN THE MOST HARDENED HEART. THIS IS A CLASSIC ACCOUNT OF HOW MARRIAGE IS OFTEN SEEN AS AN INSTITUTION THAT WILL SOCIALIZE A YOUNG MAN AND "SETTLE HIM DOWN." IF WILDNESS AND IRRESPONSIBILITY ARE THE DISEASE, MARRIAGE IS THE CURE.

BUT THIS IS NOT THE CASE IN A SECOND STORY THAT COMES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST. THIS STORY, MUCH OLDER THAN THE FIRST, BEGINS WITH THE FATHER OF BOTH ARAB AND JEW, ABRAHAM.

**ABRAHAM UNDERSTOOD THAT HIS SON, ISAAC
NEEDED A WIFE.... HIS OWN WIFE SARAH HAD
ABANDONED A PROSPEROUS LIFE IN HARAN IN
ORDER TO FOLLOW ABRAHAM TO PLACES
UNKNOWN AFTER GOD ISSUED THE CALL. AND
OFF THEY WENT WITH ALL THEIR POSSESSIONS
AND NEPHEW LOT IN TOW, TRAIPSING ACROSS
THE FERTILE CRESCENT AND DOWN THROUGH
THE NEGEV AND FINALLY BACK UP TO HEBRON,
WHERE SARAH DIED AT THE ASTOUNDING AGE
OF 125.**

ISAAC WAS BROKEN AFTER THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER, WHO HAD GIVEN BIRTH TO HIM LATE IN LIFE, AND YET ABRAHAM KNEW THAT THE BEST CURE FOR HEARTBREAK BACK THEN WAS, AS IT IS TODAY, LOVE..... ISAAC NEEDED A NEW REASON TO LIVE (24:67).

ABRAHAM SENT AN UNNAMED SERVANT OUT TO FETCH A WIFE FOR HIS SON, AND THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR LOCATING MS. RIGHT INDICATED SOME TRAVEL.....AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY ACTUALLY AS NO CANAANITE WOMAN WOULD SUFFICE AS ABRAHAM'S FUTURE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

**JUST AS ARAFAT'S SERVANTS SEARCHED IN
PALESTINIAN CAMPS FOR PROPER WIVES FOR
THEIR PALESTINIAN BOYS, ABRAHAM'S
SERVANT VENTURED BACK "HOME" TO HARAN,
SPECIFICALLY TO THE LOCAL HOT SPOT WHERE
YOUNG WOMEN REGULARLY VENTURED: THE
VILLAGE WATERING HOLE.**

**THE SERVANT'S ASSIGNMENT WAS CARRIED
OUT PRAYERFULLY. IN FACT, THIS SERVANT
FIRST LAID EYES ON THE WINSOME REBEKAH
WHILE IN THE MIDDLE OF A CONVERSATION
WITH THE LORD. WE PICK UP THE PLAY-BY-PLAY
AS IT HAPPENED:**

O LORD, GOD OF MY MASTER ABRAHAM,
PLEASE GRANT ME SUCCESS TODAY AND SHOW
STEADFAST LOVE TO MY MASTER ABRAHAM. I
AM STANDING HERE BY THE SPRING OF WATER,
AND THE DAUGHTERS OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE
ARE COMING OUT TO DRAW WATER. LET THE
GIRL TO WHOM I SHALL SAY, "PLEASE OFFER
YOUR JAR THAT I MAY DRINK," AND WHO SHALL
SAY, "DRINK, AND I WILL WATER YOUR CAMELS"
-- LET HER BE THE ONE WHOM YOU HAVE
APPOINTED FOR YOUR SERVANT ISAAC. BY THIS
I SHALL KNOW THAT YOU HAVE SHOWN
STEADFAST LOVE TO MY MASTER.

**WHILE THE SERVANT WAS SPEAKING, REBEKAH
SHOWED UP, SAID ALL THE RIGHT WORDS,
OFFERED THE STRANGER A PLACE TO SLEEP
THAT NIGHT AND THEN RAN HOME TO TELL THE
FOLKS HER NEWS WEARING A NEWLY
ACQUIRED NOSE RING AND BRACELETS ON HER
ARMS.**

***WOULD REBEKAH ACCEPT THE MISSION THIS
SERVANT PROPOSED? THE INCENTIVES
CERTAINLY CAUGHT HER ATTENTION.... FLOCKS
AND HERDS.... SILVER AND GOLD.... SERVANTS,
CAMELS AND DONKEYS..... ALL THIS AND MORE
WOULD BE HERS IF SHE ACCEPTED THIS ONCE
IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY.***

**BUT REBEKAH KNEW VERY FEW DETAILS. SURE,
THIS DEAL OFFERED HER A HUSBAND PLUS A
SIGNING BONUS.....**

BUT SHE COULD NOT HAVE KNOWN THAT HER

ACCEPTANCE WOULD MAKE HER A CRUCIAL

FIGURE IN GOD'S GREAT PLAN,..... SHE WOULD

HAVE TWIN SONS. THE NAME OF ONE OF THOSE

SONS WOULD BECOME ISRAEL. HER

GRANDCHILDREN WOULD BECOME THE 12

TRIBES OF ISRAEL..... SHE KNEW NONE OF THIS,

BUT SAID "YES" ANYWAY.

THIS CHAPTER IS ONE OF THE BIBLE'S GREAT LOVE STORIES, BUT NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE OF THE LOVE OF REBEKAH FOR ISAAC, OR ISAAC FOR REBEKAH..... THEIR MARRIAGE WAS A BLIND DATE AND A LIFE SENTENCE..... SOME SCHOLARS ARGUE THAT THE MARRIAGE ITSELF LEFT A LOT TO BE DESIRED..... BUT IT IS A GREAT STORY BECAUSE IT DEMONSTRATES GOD'S ABIDING INTEREST IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES..... GOD UNDERSTANDS OUR NEEDS AND DESIRES.

***ISAAC, DEPRESSED AND IN MOURNING, AND
WITHOUT A LIFE'S COMPANION, WAS IN
DESPERATE NEED OF A REASON TO LIVE.... AND
GOD GAVE THAT TO HIM.***

***IN THIS STORY, AS WELL AS IN THE STORY OF
OUR OWN LIVES, WE SEE THAT GOD KNOWS
OUR NEEDS BEFORE WE ARE EVEN ABLE TO
ARTICULATE THEM OURSELVES.***

GOD WAS ALSO IN ISAAC'S LIFE BRINGING
TOGETHER GOD'S PLAN FOR ISAAC'S FUTURE.
ISAAC COULD NOT HAVE KNOWN THE PRAYERS,
THE TIME AND EFFORT, THE SACRIFICE, THE
CONCERN, THE NEGOTIATING AND BARGAINING
THAT WENT ON TO BRING THE PLAN OF GOD
INTO REALITY.

GOD WAS ALSO FAITHFUL TO REBEKAH, ONE OF
THE GREAT WOMEN OF THE BIBLE. HOW
INNOCENT THAT TRIP TO THE WELL MUST HAVE
APPEARED THAT MORNING. WHAT IF SHE HAD
NOT BEEN FAITHFUL IN HER DAILY
RESPONSIBILITIES?

**GOD SAW IN HER SOMEONE TO WHOM HE
COULD ENTRUST THE FATE OF AN ENTIRE
NATION.**

**GOD WAS ALSO FAITHFUL AND LOVING IN THE
LIFE OF ABRAHAM'S SERVANT, TRADITIONALLY
THOUGHT TO BE ELIEZER..... HIS MANDATE WAS
ENORMOUS..... BEARING A PACK-TRAIN OF
GIFTS, HE HEADED OUT TO FIND A WIFE FOR THE
SON OF HIS LORD. IT WAS AN EARTHLY
ASSIGNMENT AS WELL AS A HEAVENLY MISSION.**

**NO ONE STANDS BEYOND THE SWEEP OF GOD'S
PROVIDENCE: MAN, WOMAN, CHILD, MASTER,
SERVANT, HUSBAND, WIFE, SON OR DAUGHTER.
GOD TAKES CARE OF HIS OWN.**

**IN THIS CASE, GOD BROUGHT TO ISAAC THE
OBJECT OF HIS LOVE'S AFFECTION. LOVE IS ONE
OF GOD'S SWEET GIFTS, AND BY GRACE IT
REVEALS ITSELF IN MANY WAYS.**

**IN MARRIAGE WE DISCOVER GOD'S DESIGN FOR
TWO PEOPLE TO SHARE THEIR LIVES, TO
SUPPORT EACH OTHER THROUGH WHATEVER
GREAT PLAN GOD HAS CREATED FOR THEM.**

**WHEN ISAAC LOOKED UP AND SAW CAMELS
COMING, HE COULD NOT KNOW THAT WHAT WAS
ALSO COMING WAS HIS FUTURE, HIS DESTINY,
HIS GREAT LOVE..... WHEN REBEKAH LOOKED
UP AND CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF THE ONE SHE
HAD HEARD ABOUT, SHE PREPARED TO MEET
HIM FACE TO FACE..... IN SARAH'S TENT,
REBEKAH WAS LOVED..... ISAAC WAS
COMFORTED. GOD HAD GIVEN THEM NEW
REASONS TO LIVE.**

**LOVE OVERCOMES WHATEVER TERRORIZES US,
WHETHER IT IS LONELINESS AND DEEP SORROW
OR SELF-DOUBT AND BITTER REGRET.**

LOVE GIVES US A REASON TO LIVE!!

PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND

FOR ME.....AMEN!