



St Stephens Williamstown Uniting Church in Australia

Service of the Word for the Gathered & those at Home

Proper 9A – Fifth Sunday after Pentecost - Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2020 – 9:30AM

Prepared by Rev S. Juliette Maua'i



*Place a cross and Bible on a table (if possible) with a **Green** cloth - today's Liturgical Colour.*

*Prepare reflective music, hymns. Open YouTube to copy then paste link OR click on link.*

**Readings: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Psalm 45:10-17 or Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145:8-14; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30.**

## We Gather as the People of God

Offertory – place in Bowl in the Narthex

**MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT AS THE BIBLE AND WORSHIP LEADERS ENTER PLEASE STAND**

*Congregational responses in bold type*

**Lighting of the Christ Candle** Janet Howie

### Call to Worship

Holy God,

You call us through the generations of Abraham and Sarah,  
alongside our other sisters and brothers, descendants of Hagar and Ishmael.  
Your covenant carries through from ancient times to our present day,  
in the partnership of Rebekah and Isaac.

Come to us in our mutual covenant.

God calls us to be the family of God in Christ,  
to follow, to live justly, to offer mercy, and to gather God's people.

We come before you O God in praise and worship. **Amen.**

*Please remain standing as you are able*

**Song: TIS 183 Sing of the Lord's goodness...** <https://youtu.be/q5R9PmGf3aE>

*Please be seated*

**Acknowledgement to Country** Rev S. Juliette Maua'i

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this Land, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.  
I pay my respect to their Elders: past, present and emerging.

### Greetings / Welcome

The grace of the Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

### Opening Prayer

Holy One,

we remember Your promises of old through the covenants with our ancestors.

We have a new covenant written on our hearts,  
a covenant through Your Son, Jesus the Christ.

We are given the promise of new life,  
and the hope of resurrection.

We thank You and praise You for the blessings of being in covenant with You.

May we remember our baptism, the renunciation of sin, the commitment to You,  
and the acceptance of Your transformative love in our lives.

In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

**Sung Prayer of Confession TIS 635 'Forgive our sins as we forgive'** <https://youtu.be/rASh2i3ytLk>

*Remain seated.*

### Assurance of Pardon:

Jesus calls us to forgive, and when we forgive others, we are forgiven ourselves.

When we love others, we feel God's love in us this we recall in our baptism into Christ.

We are renewed and restored for the journey of faith.

In Christ, our sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God!**

## We Listen for God's Word

Iris Whitehurst

Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet; **A light to our path**

**Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67** *Isaac meets Rebekah and marries*

**Song: TIS 636 God has spoken to his people (Open your ears, O Christian people)** <https://youtu.be/W7Bp1lJLcZU>

*Please be seated*

**Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30** *Messengers from John the Baptist. Jesus thanks his Father and calls, "come to Me and I will give you rest."*

**Lord, may we meditate on these words of scripture and come to a deeper understanding of their meaning for our time.**

**Reflection: Focus – Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 / Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

*What love is this that surpasses all that is unknown to our understanding in life; a love that leads us if we are willing to listen and go; a love that binds/brings together that which separates us in relationship to each other, to the land and waterways, and to our Creator?*

Today in our OT reading we have an “unnamed servant”, male gender, a trusted servant in Abraham’s household. The NRSV, New Revised Standard Version translation, says this unnamed servant is the ‘oldest’ in the house of Abraham. The NIV, New International Version translation, notes the unnamed servant as the ‘senior’ servant, in charge of all. This senior servant’s task is to find a wife for Abraham’s son, Isaac.

Abraham’s servant is under ‘oath’ (but I won’t focus on the process of this ‘oath’; that is for another day). He has specific instructions from his master, Abraham, and this unidentified servant is tired, thirsty, and probably dusty from his travels. He has travelled from Hebron in the southern hill country of Canaan, to the city of Nahor in Aram-Naharaim (Gen 24:10), in upper Mesopotamia (Iraq).

The servant is under ‘oath’ to find a wife for Abraham and the late Sarah’s beloved son, Isaac. The specific instruction is not to seek a wife for Isaac from Canaan, but from Abraham’s extended family in Nahor (Gen. 24:1-9). Note, Nahor is the city, and Nahor is also Abraham’s brother.

In some traditional societies today marriage between cousins was the preferred arrangement. It was similar in ancient times that arranged marriages took place. We have Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, who is Isaac’s first cousin. When you read ahead in Genesis, in the next generation, Jacob’s two wives, Leah, and Rachel, are first cousins.

The servant made this long trip back to Abraham’s land and kindred, to prevent his son Isaac from taking the same route to return to the land from which they came (Gen.24:6). God kept his promise to Abraham. A promise of a future in the new land for Abraham and Sarah’s descendants and, Abraham is determined for Isaac to remain there.

So, what looks like a simple story of an arranged marriage, it is really an intersection of several faith journeys. If we have been reading the Genesis passages, I hope you will guard in confidence here how God is with those who travel to new and unfamiliar destinations, however shape or form, pathway, or distance, it takes; even as you speak in your heart, God is with you.

Perhaps God is with those whose arrivals or returns are to places changed by a loved one’s death, or by their new family ties. Think about this for a moment! The servant prays for a sign of God’s steadfast love or God’s loyal covenant (*hesed* - Hebrew) for Abraham (24:12, 14, 27, 49).

Rebekah is the answer to the servant’s prayer. Rebekah, the hardworking caring young woman who draws water from the well (24:27). This is an echo of another biblical story of a woman at the well, a Samaritan woman in John 4:4-26.

Most of this Genesis 24 narrative is as much about the ‘heart’ of this unnamed servant – his character, attitude, words, and action. This servant is trusted and, he trusts both God and Abraham.

By taking the time to read outside the familiar biblical ancestors God calls, like Abraham and Sarah, and reading in between the story lines of the larger narrative, with a focus on this trusted servant as an example, might I say to you my friends, that this ‘servant’ may well be ‘you’!

The absence of the servant’s name invites you to delve deeper and ask, ‘why’ is she/he nameless? In chpt 24 of the first book attributed to Moses, that is Genesis, the servant put his own interests aside. He accepts his master Abraham’s oath/covenant, and to his God, you might say his spiritual master, and witnesses to God’s presence in everything that occurs – ahead of him, during his encounter, and following his interaction with Abraham’s family.

In Abraham’s God, the servant recognizes God’s enduring covenant to Abraham and his family, in a chance meeting at the well (Gen. 24:12-14, 21, 26-27, 40). At the well, this servant’s calling intersects with Rebekah, and the servant’s testimony speaks of how the Lord led him to Isaac’s future wife (24:42-49).

The unnamed servant's witness wins the consent of Rebekah's family when he speaks to Laban, Rebekah's brother, and his ordained plan comes to fruition (24:50-51). They accept that, "The thing comes from the LORD" (Gen. 24:50), "as the LORD has spoken" (Gen. 24:51). The trusted servant returns to Abraham, his mission is accomplished by the grace of God (24:54-56).

In this intersection of faith journeys and intersection of relationships with his master's family, Rebekah's journey begins at the well. At the 'well' the servant was prepared to meet a 'woman' whom for many women in the ancient times, would come out in the evening to draw water at the well - a significant but often overlooked meeting place!

The 'well' - a place of chance meetings for marriage partners for his master's son, Isaac. The 'well', a place for those 'coming to rest' and to 'drink and quench their thirst'.

Those who are weary in their travels are drawn to the well; there you will find hospitality. Hear the invitation in today's Gospel reading where Jesus says, "come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28).

Of course there is more to the narratives but today I hope you have heard a story that testifies to the covenant, a power of love that comforts and heals grief. Isaac took Rebekah and was comforted after his mother's death. (Genesis 24:67).

This is a story of faith journeys intersecting with the providence of the cross and the activity of God in their midst. It is also a story for us today that leads us on our way as this nameless servant's witness, testifies to God's love and abundant provision (24:7, 40). Will you follow and witness in the unknown parts of your journey as this unidentified servant did? Amen! **Thanks be to God!**

**Song: TIS 578 tune TIS 143 How firm a foundation...** <https://youtu.be/rwGW8qRqz4I>

*Please be seated*

## **We Respond to God's Word**

**Song: TIS 654 (Verses 1, 3, & 5) When love is found, and hope comes home...** <https://youtu.be/2FdNAGoaD2Y>

**Offertory Prayer - Offering brought forward**

God of abundance,  
Accept these our gifts we bring today,  
And the resources we share to provide for others.  
Bless and multiply all that we offer for your purposes.  
In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

**Notices – Life's joys and community concerns** *Janet Howie*

## **Prayers of the People**

**THE LORD'S PRAYER...** *(prayerfully pray the Lord's Prayer in the language/ version of your choice)*

**Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
As we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
And deliver us from evil  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

## **We Are Sent Forth into the World**

**Song: The Summons – Will you come and follow me...** <https://youtu.be/o469PRLdbHU>

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known?  
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?  
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?  
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?  
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?  
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,  
And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the “you” you hide if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you’ve found to reshape the world around,  
Through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.  
In Your company I’ll go where Your love and footsteps show.  
Thus, I’ll move and live and grow in you and you in me. +  
*John L. Bell*

### **Blessing/Dismissal**

May the Creator who called forth life by speaking,  
Jesus who bore the Word for the life of the world,  
and the Spirit whose breath makes language possible,  
sustain you in all ways.

Go out into the world of restrictions and daily change,  
to places where you are called to adapt, love, care, and sustain creation.  
Allow others to speak their words of life and speak gently your words.  
Be patient in telling and living the story of Jesus, in Jesus’ name! **Amen!**

### **Postlude**

*Worship Leaders and Minister move out into the world.  
Please exit the sanctuary through the South door (near the pulpit) and maintain social distancing.*



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*(can also leave a message, text, or email Juliette)*  
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