

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
July 5, 2020- 5th Sunday after Pentecost- 9A
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Gen 24: 34- 38, 42-49, 58-67/ Psalm 45/ Rom 7: 15-25/ Mt 11: 16-19, 25-30

From today's collect: **'God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor; Grant... that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection.'** †

This "Independence Day" weekend, as we celebrate our independence and respect for individual rights, it's also important for us to remember our interdependence.

We exist in this world in a web of **relationships**. "Relationship" refers to the natural association between things, the connection we have with another, and our meaningful and necessary interactions with those around us. In all we do, our relationships are our link to nature, to people (whether friends or strangers), and to our God. At times these links are pulled and stretched and may even break, but these links are also strengthened and hold firm because such companionship brings us joy and fulfillment, and most importantly, it brings love.

The OT passage we heard today is a portion of a longer *novella*, highlighting divine guidance in human life; Guidance over our interactions and relationships in this world. One theory regarding how sacred scripture came to exist proposes that writing from several different schools of thought or traditions were combined into what we call the OT today. This particular passage comes to us from the so-called "J" or Yahwist tradition of the 9th century BC and it speaks of God in lively, human terms. The Yahwist writer describes a God who is intimately involved in human activity. By means of artful story telling, a theological vision is fashioned about God's relationship to humankind involving promise, commitment, and fulfillment. The story we just heard is about new relationships (between Isaac and Rebekah and between their families and kinsmen) and about a new generation. New Things. No longer does the story go on about Abraham and Sarah, it becomes about Isaac and his new wife, their progeny, and their future. And the story points out the great gift given by God to Abraham (and thus to all of us as his human family) love. Love between God and God's creation, between those (like Rebekah and Isaac) who love each other, and between all human beings. In the Genesis stories, God has revealed his *Hesed* — his steadfast, unconditional love— to Abraham and his family and it becomes the basis for characterizing all human relationships. It becomes the integral purpose of Creation.

Important to the story, is that God is behind the union of Isaac and Rebekah, their love comes from God; this is witnessed by many third-party observers. At the time of Rebekah's acceptance of the proposal, her father states (in a verse left out of our version) "the thing comes from the Lord... let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken." Rebekah's willingness to go, to leave her family (not consistent with her tribal/ cultural tradition, she could have stayed)... her

willingness to leave all she knew to live with the one she loves, this came from God. And, her response was faithful to God.

Contrast this with St. Paul's struggles in his letter to the Romans... being caught up in sin and self-pride. He basically confesses to something we are all guilty of. "I am full of myself... after all, I've spent a lot of time giving in to sin, and building up false pride. I've tried to do things that are good, but it doesn't work... but over and over it becomes about me, not God."

Jesus also speaks of this same lack of focus, and how human pride distracts us from listening to God. In today's Gospel story, he compares his present generation to children playing in the marketplace. Children distracted and not paying attention. Children who miss out, and later whine to their parents, "we wanted play with you, and skip rope, you were always too tired. We wanted to talk, but you were always too busy." And he warns them, it has more to do with inattention and misunderstanding the truth. "John came fasting and they called him crazy, I came feasting and they called be a lush." He goes on to pray, "I thank you Father that you have concealed your ways from the sophisticates and know-it-alls, yet made them clear to infants, that is, the humble and vulnerable."

Reflecting this week on all that has been happening in our own world, the alarming spread of COVID 19 across our country, and how divided we have become even as we try to celebrate our nation's 244th birthday... I wonder, have we missed it? Do any of us grasp God's ways? We live in a society where truth is often predicated as debatable, and where lies are painted as the truth. Facts are facts, and yet no matter how much clear scientific fact is presented, some people decide that they don't like it and won't play fair. And we start to feel weary and wonder whether the truth even matters any more. Turning a blind eye from the truth is foolish... and avoiding the truth is not just juvenile, it may be criminal!

Jesus' invitation to his disciples is the same invitation he offers us today, "Come, rest, and learn the truth from me." We are invited by Jesus into relationship— "The yolk is easy and the burden light!" The Greek word for "yolk" is often used to mean "servitude," and Jesus tells us that it will be "light." He delivers his beloved from the burdens of human/ worldly slavery and servitude. Freedom comes once we put aside the pretense of human understanding and conceit... when we let go of our desire for power, for religious, racial, or national superiority... and enter into a loving relationship with God. "No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses." We are called to follow Jesus, and do God's will.

It's not about being wise or intelligent, beautiful or talented, black or white, Democrat or Republican, rich or poor, or even about being right! It's about openness to the truth, displaying humility, and being willing to follow God's plan faithfully. The Scriptures try to make it clear: it's not about following our own desires in life, but to entering into relationship with the divine through our relationships with each other.

We all exist in a web of relationships... what is it that keeps us from becoming entangled and stuck in that web? What allows us to move along? It's about loving those we are called to love... to be united, not divided as a people... to love as God has loved us, with unconditional and steadfast love. If we could only do this, it would lighten the burden for all! May God bless us, heal us, and continue to love us. God bless the United States of America! †