

## ***Discernment: Seeking that Holy Window***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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Steeped in so much tradition, and patriarchy. That was my first thought as I read again this story of Rebekah, and struggled with a servant sent out on behalf of a master to find a wife for the master's son. The customs of ancient times baffle me. It seems like young Rebekah is part of an unsettling transaction.

But this is not a financial transaction – rather, more a spiritual one. Does that settle better for me?

God is placed at the centre of this encounter. Outside our hearing, but part of the larger story, old patriarch Abraham sends his servant Eliezer off on a Mission. Typical in ancient stories, aging parents Abraham & Sarah are concerned that their son Isaac does not have a life partner. They want to secure a legacy to carry on through the generations.

Eliezer rather comedically works out a sign with God as he approaches the outskirts of the town of Nahor and parks the camels and gear near a well. He is thirsty from the journey, so Eliezer says to God: *God, I will ask a woman that I meet, "please give me a little water from your jar to drink." When it is the right woman for Isaac, God, make her respond, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also."*

So, God is guiding, but there sure seems to be a lot of coaching from this servant! This brings to mind the danger in our modern Christian prayer life to project our desires onto God – claiming that it is God's way.

These powerful, but often perplexing Bible stories, can raise many questions for moderns like you and I. Can finding God's wisdom – not just our human yearnings – in the midst of everyday living happen like this:

- When we seek a partner in life?
- When we hope to find a job that will be fulfilling?
- When resolving a problem that has paralyzed us?
- And, how about picking the right investments on the stock market?

I think that whatever we believe, we come to worship seeking something – whether comfort, wisdom or inspiration. I hope that we do not seek an echo chamber within which we just want our own thoughts about life to be confirmed!

At the heart of this story from the Hebrew Bible is the importance of keeping a mindfulness about God, whatever you or I understand God to be, at the centre of a major decision in life. One thing I observe in this story from Genesis is that all the main players of this story – old worried Abraham, servant Eliezer, and even Rebekah – all these characters rely on discernment.

"Discernment", a big word used in many different ways, but common to the theological understandings. We can apply discernment to our everyday lives. Principles like: stepping away from the fray of life, listening, praying; balancing our rational thinking with

being in tune with the heart; and, in discernment, drawing wisdom from others, a community, especially when we are making significant decisions in life.

Discernment: Stepping back and listening for God's voice, listening to what reason tells us as well our heart, and making big decisions within a circle of wise people.

Praying with Torrin recently here, watching him inaugurate his own discernment of ministry and life, I was reminded my own discernment process 30 years ago. I needed good discernment because I didn't see ministry in my future at all! I particularly needed a community of people who knew me, whom I respected as wise and faithful people around me, to begin hearing God's invitation to me that was previously drowned out by the din of life.

To be quite honest, I don't think our world has patience for this pace of intentionality. We can make some major decisions very quickly, mindlessly. Think of major decision you made under pressure. How did it feel? Where is the opportunity in times of stress for God's still small voice, or sage advice of others to sink in?

Discernment is essential to many Biblical stories, and to our lives. Think about Jesus in that poignant moment at Gethsemane: Jesus asking his Abba – intimately referring to God as his dad – asking for this cup of suffering to be taken from him. Jesus knows, discerns, at that moment what needs to happen. Often holy wisdom is very different, even counter to, our wisdom.

In the original Bible story, Rebekah's family asks Eliezer to leave Rebekah with them for 10 days. Pressed for time, they still insist that they must speak with her. Rebekah's circle created space for her to discern. A very small window in everyday life that we can squeeze out for discerning Holy Wisdom – but, I'm suggesting, and I believe that Bible time again confirms it – God's voice waits for us in those small windows that we create.

This week, your homework, your mission if you accept it, is to create space for quiet reflection, talking to God before making big decisions. Where is it that you create that quiet? Where do feel calm? I create space when I'm buying things. Since I learned that buying Fair Trade products makes lives better for people who picked or produced the products I consume, it has become my practice to take time to think before I buy. I research the product when I have time, or I just notice the label, where it was made. I wonder about the people at the sometime far other end of the production chain. I pray for them, and for the ability to discern what products to buy. That is not just ethics, for me it is faith. Loving especially my neighbour whom I cannot see.

Discernment: being open to that window in our busy lives helps us to hear holy wisdom and to make faithful decisions. Open us, God. Open us. Amen.