

## **July 9, 2017 – And He Loved Her**

**Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67**  
**Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) 2:8-13**

Summer is traditionally the season of weddings. How many of you got married in the summer? Just two days ago, I officiated at a wedding ceremony here in this sanctuary. I have to admit that officiating at weddings is not one of my favourite tasks in ministry. There is usually so much focus on the pageantry of the day – the suits, the dresses, the flowers, the music and, of course, the photos – that no one pays much attention to what is being said, what promises are being made.

Marriage is a big commitment. Two people express their love for each other and their desire to live together, to be faithful to one another and to support each other for rest of their lives. These are not easy promises to keep. According to Statistics Canada, about 38 per cent of all marriages that took place in 2004 will have ended in divorce by 2035. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/4-in-10-1st-marriages-end-in-divorce-report-1.953894> That's about 2 in every 5 marriages.

One of the things that I require before officiating at a wedding is that the couple go through some form of marriage preparation. Each year, I join with the Anglican priest and the Lutheran pastors to put together a marriage prep weekend. During the weekend, couples are given the opportunity to talk about key topics such as their love languages, their personality types, communication styles and their families of origin. We have local specialists who come and share

guidance on topics such as investments, debt, wills, and issues of power and violence in relationships. It's wonderful to experience the depth of sharing that takes place at these gatherings. We can only hope that this learning experience helps to give each couple the tools they need for a successful marriage.

Most of the couples that I marry have known each other for several years and many have lived together before getting married. But even with marriage prep and their experience of being together, couples still end up getting divorced. So it's hard to imagine how it works in other cultures where marriages are arranged and the bride and groom meet for the first time just before the wedding. Not only do they not live together, they hardly know each other before the vows are said.

In today's reading from Genesis we have a classic example of an arranged marriage. The reading begins with Abraham's steward or servant at the home of Bethuel, Abraham's nephew. The steward is explaining how he got there – that his master had sent him to find a suitable wife for his son, Isaac and how, when he arrived, the steward met Rebecca, Bethuel's daughter, at the local spring.

The steward even explains the test that he devised to determine if a prospective bride was suitable. He had prayed to God, "I will ask her, 'Please let me have a drink of water from the spring.' If she answers, 'Have a drink, and I will water your camels as well,' let it be that she is the woman whom YHWH has chosen to become the spouse of Abraham's heir Isaac." Well Rebecca had passed this test with flying colours, so the steward asked her about her parentage. As soon

as he knew Rebecca was Abraham's great-niece, the steward gave her some jewelry as a gift and thanked God for his success. And that's how they ended up at Rebecca's home with her parents and her brother, Laban.

Before heading back to his master, the steward gave Rebecca and her family the opportunity to back out of this arrangement. But when they asked Rebecca directly, "Yes, I am ready to leave." So the next morning they headed off on their journey. When Rebecca saw Isaac, she covered her face with a veil, as was the tradition of that time. In the scripture we read, "The steward recounted to Isaac all that had been done. Then Isaac led Rebecca into Sarah's tent and she became his wife." They didn't have a big ceremony or make any declarations of love. In those days the marriage became legal when it was consummated, in other words when they had sex.

But what I am fascinated with is the ending to that sentence, "Then Isaac led Rebecca into Sarah's tent and she became his wife, and he loved her." "And he loved her." You might think, oh that just another way of saying they made love, or had sex. But that's not the case. In the Bible there are many euphemisms for the act of sex, the Bible talks about "knowing" someone, it uses the phrase "he went into her," but, especially in Genesis, it doesn't use the word for sex. No, the scripture passage tells us that Isaac actually loved his wife, Rebecca, this woman that he met only a few hours before they were married.

So I wonder. "How did he love his wife?" Was it romantic love – the love of fairy tales and movies? At weddings I often explain to the couple that romantic love,

as wonderful as it is, is not the basis for a lasting relationship. A good marriage needs a love that is a deep affection, a commitment, a love that is more profound than just fleeting romantic feelings.

Or was Isaac experiencing erotic love, the love that is portrayed in today's second scripture reading – the love of great desire and passion? I don't know how many of you are familiar with the Song of Solomon, also known as the Song of Songs. This is a book in the bible that is basically a love poem and a pretty explicit one, at that. "Here comes my lover, running down the mountains like a gazelle, leaping the hills like a stag in search of his doe." Was this the kind of love that Isaac felt for his wife, Rebecca?

Or was it the love that is felt between good friends - a love of companionship, understanding and caring? Even though it was an arranged marriage, did Isaac and Rebecca's relationship grow so that they were able to become friends as well as lovers?

The Hebrew language has separate words for each of these types of love: deep affection & commitment is Ahava, passionate love is Dod, and friendship is Raya. It is possible that what Isaac felt was a combination of all three. When Ahava, Dod and Raya exist together, then a marriage is built on a solid foundation and has the possibility of continuing for many years.

<http://www.harmonyoftheheart.com/2007/02/lighting-flames-of-love.html>

Many believe that God's love for us is like the love between a married couple. In fact, scholars tell us that the only reason the Song of Songs got included in the Bible was because second-century rabbis saw it as an allegory. They believed the true subject-matter was not sexual desire between a man and a woman but God's love for Israel." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song\\_of\\_Songs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_of_Songs)

God's love for us includes all three types of love: Ahava, Dod and Raya. We are loved with deep affection, commitment, passion, caring and understanding. And we are called to love God in the same way. We are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Let us sing a song of love.