

“Anything But Dull”
Sermon for 24 November, 2019
Text: Genesis 24:1-33

Eleazar of Damascus, **the oldest of his household, who had charge of everything Abraham had** (v. 2), he is the model of a true minister of Christ. He was the most trusted, the chief steward, and if anything should happen to Isaac, the heir of Abraham, he, Eleazar, stood to inherit everything! (Genesis 15:2) Abraham is very concerned for Isaac. He has lost his mother, Sarah, and Sarah was his comfort—his confident, spiritual counselor and friend. And, it might appear, no one could stack up, or compare to her—what young woman would dare? Sarah was both an excellent wife and the epitome of beauty and as long as she lived no other woman could be to Isaac what his mother was. But, now she is gone, and Isaac has apparently not been dating much. Abraham’s concern is that he not get tangled up with some Canaanite woman: **Swear . . . you will not take a wife for my son from among the daughters of the Canaanites!** (v. 3) **but will go to my country, to my kindred and take a wife for my son Isaac.** (v. 4) Abraham was nearly 140 years old when he had this exchange with Eleazar, and Eleazar was no spring chicken. So, picture this: two older gentlemen plotting to find a wife for Isaac, who himself is entering middle age. Now the journey that Abraham urges Eleazar to embark on is some 550 miles long (a minimum of 21 good travel days) some of which was along trade routes, and some of that journey was over trackless desert, wasteland, peopled by bandits and thieves. Eleazar would be in a caravan, carrying some bride-wealth—expensive gifts to seal the deal between prospective in-laws. The thieves wouldn’t know this—unless they were somehow aware of his mission! But Eleazar would know what had been entrusted to him, what it was for and that the loss of it would be grievous.

Isn’t this exciting?! Eleazar is sent on a quest for true love, a bride for Christ, the Bridegroom. He is sent on a bride-quest and not just for anybody, but for Isaac, the son of promise and the son of his beloved master Abraham. This is not a mission that you want to get wrong! And this is not a trial marriage. Eleazar would have but one shot to get it right. “I must find Isaac’s bride!” But, as I said, Eleazar is the model of a true minister of Christ; he is the picture of a godly servant. This translated means that Eleazar is a model for you and me—we are God’s servants and as such we also are on a love quest. Only we are on a quest for a suitable bride, on a collective level meaning, *the church*, for our Lord Jesus Christ—the Bridegroom who eagerly awaits the results of our search!

We *find that bride* through witnessing. We don’t typically dress witnessing up quite so grandly because, I fear, we have lost sight of what we have been commissioned to do—a bride quest! Our Christian walk would be “anything but dull” if we were to recover a fuller sense of our commission. **Don’t take a wife for my son from among the Canaanites** means, don’t take a wife for God’s Son from the worldly, from the unbelieving masses (the unconverted!). Rather find a bride from amongst the redeemed, from those who are uniquely *called*, out from among the lost, a seed of promise, from among the spiritually quickened, those who are prone to faith, or open to God, even longing to be saved. That demographic, that sample . . . find my bride amongst them, make my suit to them and, if they are willing (if they are open to marriage), if they are willing to come and be joined to Jesus, then, adorn them and *bring them home with you* to be presented to the Father for the Son.

Yes, we are looking for the perfect candidates—but, because this is not merely the match of one man to one woman, because this is the match of the bride of Christ, the church, the whole body of believers(!) *there is room for us all to bring all those we have found!* The whole church is together the Bride of Christ and all of us together will be joined to the one Bridegroom.

This is our amazing, thrilling duty. Yes, we are commissioned to find the bride. And the beauty of this analogy is that it broadens our scope of mission. It is about marriage, not church membership; marriage, not religious affiliation! We, convinced of the virtue and worth of both our Master (God) and of the Bridegroom (Christ Jesus), embark on an adventure of faith. We play an indispensable role, we are matchmakers and we serve the interests of all the parties involved! Yes, we find those who are looking for love and we introduce them to the One who loves them perfectly. We introduce them to someone who delights in them utterly, and who loves them wholly, completely and entirely. We introduce them to someone who is able to love them steadfastly and eternally.

Eleazar's journey is an allegory of the Christian life! This means that there is some instruction to be gleaned from this episode.

The servant of Christ is like this Eleazar. He is sent to find a wife for his Master's son, and his heart's desire is that many will be presented to Christ, through his offices, in the day of Christ's appearing—as the bride, the Lamb's wife. It is God's errand that we are on! It is birthed in our communion with God, it grows out of our conversation with God . . . it involves talking things over, discussing concerns, challenges and difficulties we will face with God. Yes, there will be challenges. Frustrations, obstructions and set-backs. *We need to hear from God that this is indeed what he wants us to do?* “We need to plead with God for the souls of men before we set out to plead with men for God.” (CHS) Eleazar began his mission in the conference room with Abraham—that would be our prayer chamber. Without this instruction we cannot claim that our work is a work of obedience—to do the Father's will is to at first know what it is. A weighty errand. We need to know from our Commissioner, the essence and the measure of our calling.

Witnessing entails telling people about God, about the majesty, the splendor and grandeur of God! And it entails doing this credibly. Rebekah has to believe Eleazar! What is the equivalent of the costly presents that Eleazar showers upon the astonished young woman? The equivalent of the rich and costly bracelets and jewels? They are tokens of the promising future! Indications of what lies ahead. Eleazar also spoke of the goodness of Isaac, his gentle and gracious character—his positive traits to prove a good husband. Eleazar introduced Isaac and Abraham to her—she could truly exclaim “I've heard such good things about you both!” Because she had. Three weeks plus of testimony, of stories and family history from one who had seen it all! And, yes, she probably asked about Sarah as well, her service to Abraham and Isaac, her life, gifts, her recent death and so on. *I believe it to be true that people need to hear stories about Jesus—from the bible and from your experience of him . . . they want to be filled in about the groom they are being brought to marry!* Strangers shouldn't marry. That's why so many best friends end up connecting best friends with best friends! Familiarity builds trust! Trust is a prime marriage commodity!

Perhaps you have never thought of yourself as a suitor recruiter, as a kind of corporate head hunter or sport's talent scout even, scouring the population for God seekers (for potential saints who are yet in the world). For we may suppose that the young, unattached Rebecca had **longings for a good husband**, she may have had aspirations of being a wife some day, dreams—but she had no way of knowing that an “elderly/seasoned?” gentleman from the west would ride his camel into her world, the city of Nahor, and offer her a proposal of marriage one evening. And Eleazar, apart from the angelic guidance service, would never have found his way to that place, at the right time, so that the prayers of all—Master and servant alike together with her innocent heart—might be met that enchanting evening. **She was Abraham's niece!** Of all the young women in the whole wide world, she was the one who appeared. She would respond to his request for a drink with **Drink and I will water your camels**. She would respond to a stranger with open kindness. Petty girls with no generosity about them would not have undertaken such toil without inducement, without cause.

She had no idea that she was the fulfillment of a love message. **But this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.** (v.14) A most extraordinary confirmation through the most ordinary of means! Eleazar, however, was more taken with God than he was with her simple, kind act of service. It wasn't that her chore was arduous, or even demanding. No, it was that her actions were an actual answered prayer. I know that we struggle with being someone else's answered prayer *but that doesn't mean answered prayer doesn't happen like this*. It does and Rebecca's hospitality proves it in particular. **The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.** (v.21) Eleazar studied her and was filled with confirming wonder, then he gave her gifts!

Steadfast love to my master. That phrase sticks with me from this passage. This marriage match arises out of the love of Abraham for Isaac, the love of Eleazar for his Master, and the love of God for Abraham and for every soul on earth **and that takes this story from the level of a romance to the highest level of divine love**—a love expressive of the delight with which God regarded Abraham before the foundations of the earth, before Creation. And, I might well add, speaks to the regard God has for each one of us! Who we are, where we go, what we do . . . God cares for his own. And that is why he sends us out to seek and find them, to find his sheep wheresoever they have been scattered.

Allow me to assist you to this divine level once more. God the Father's heart is set on giving Jesus Christ the church who shall be his beloved forever. Jesus who suffered loneliness as none other, abandoned and forsaken by all for the sake of our salvation—thus he made sacrifice for our sins—shall never be alone again. He must not be alone and the church is his blessed, dear, appointed companion. We, the bride, are purposed to be at his side. The Father has found, is finding and continues to find the gathered Bride for his glorious Bridegroom, his own Son. **This great marriage is the plan.** Woe to us if we “sociologize,” or conventionalize, or customize this marriage out of its sacred existence. Woe to us if we reduce marriage to a social institution only, or treat it as a civil state, a matter of *merely* legal entitlement and access. There is nothing holy in most of all that. The marriage feast of the Lamb is enormously significant in in heaven: it is the consummation of the divine plan, the end point of human history—it is the blessed summing up of it all. It was God's institution in Eden, it is the figure for Christ's relationship

to the redeemed, it is a scene of consummate glory—the supreme love feast that has no end.

How shall we find men and women who can worthily respond to love “so amazing and so divine?” Our job is to locate and recover all the hearts fit to be wedded to him? How shall we find those who by divine decree, even election, are destined to be linked forever with the Lord of all Creation, the crucified and risen One, their Husband?!

Abraham could say to Isaac: ***All I have is yours.*** Similarly, God has made our Blessed Lord, **the Heir of all things**- Heb. 1:2, **the One by whom he made all the worlds** John 1:3, Col. 1:16, **in Him all the fullness of the Godhead should dwell** Col. 1:19; 2:9 . . . and *this is the groom we have to offer every prospective bride.* ***What dignity will be bestowed on those betrothed to Jesus!*** What height of eminence! It is not possible to marry any further up! And we, when find such a candidate, we are privileged to give them the bracelet, the jewels . . . the outward signs, or seals of promise, the love tokens of their waiting Groom! Will you give your heart to Jesus, the One who waits and yearns for you? Will you say yes to Him? Have him to be your confidence, your salvation, your all in all? Are you willing to become his so that he may be yours?

Think of who you shall become, married to Jesus? His delight, yes, and loving friend, and eternal companion . . . partner of all his wealth and kingdom, fulfillment of the covenant promises. Think of all that, beloved, as we journey home together, back to him.

Amen

Lyrics to “Tell me the stories of Jesus”

1. Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear,
Things I would ask him to tell me if he were here.
Scenes by the wayside, tales of the sea,
Stories of Jesus, tell them to me.

2. Oh, let me hear how the children stood round his knee.
I shall imagine his blessings resting on me;
Words full of kindness, deeds full of grace,
All in the love-light of Jesus' face.

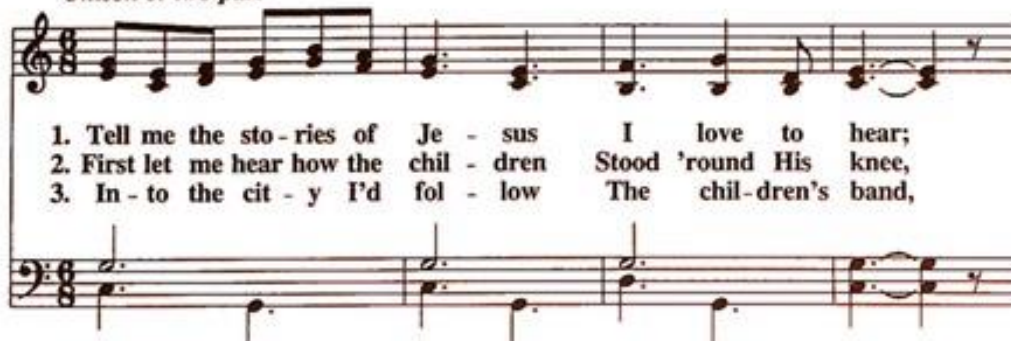
3. Tell me, in accents of wonder, how rolled the sea,
Tossing the boat in a tempest on Galilee!
And how the Master, ready and kind,
Words: W. H. Parker, 1845–1929

Music: Frederic A. Challinor, 1866–1952
Matthew 4:23–24, Mark 10:13–16, Luke 8:22–25

67 Tell Me the Stories of Jesus

Hosanna in the highest — Mark 11:10 KJV

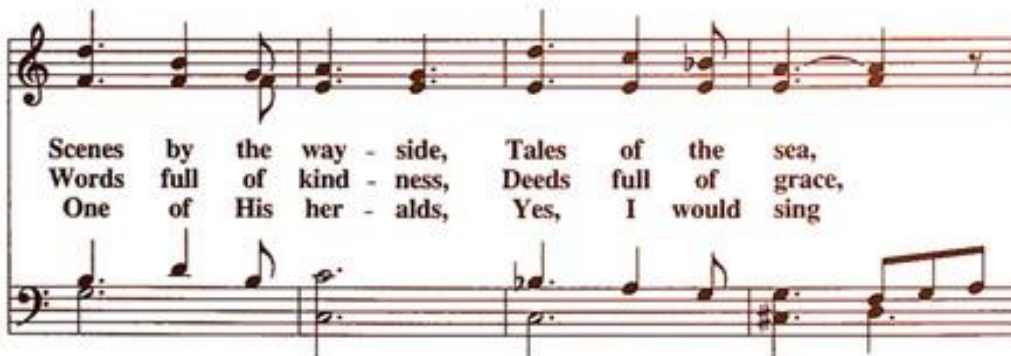
Unison or two-part



1. Tell me the sto - ries of Je - sus I love to hear;
 2. First let me hear how the chil - dren Stood 'round His knee,
 3. In - to the cit - y I'd fol - low The chil - dren's band,



Things I would ask Him to tell me If He were here:
 And I shall fan - cy His bless - ing Rest - ing on me;
 Wav - ing a branch of the palm tree High in my hand;



Scenes by the way - side, Tales of the sea,
 Words full of kind - ness, Deeds full of grace,
 One of His her - als, Yes, I would sing



Sto - ries of Je - sus, Tell them to me.
 All in the love - light Of Je - sus' face.
 Loud - est ho - san - nas, "Je - sus is King!" A - men.