

Making Space for God

Invocation: We beseech Thee, O Lord, let our hearts be graciously enlightened by Thy holy radiance, that we may serve Thee without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life; that so we may escape the darkness of this world, and by Thy guidance attain the land of eternal brightness, through Thy mercy, O blessed Lord, who dost live and govern all things, world without end. Amen

From The Sarum Breviary (England/ 1085)

Looking to the Past- Take some times to settle yourself. Invite the Lord to guide and direct your thoughts for the day. Think back over where you have been this last month. Review your journal. What burdens, emotions, and concerns do you carry? What are you thankful for? When have you experienced the Lord's presence? Journal your thoughts and offer these to the Lord.

Scripture Reading- Isaac and Rebekah- Genesis 24

It's an elegant story. The cast of characters included old father Abraham, melancholy son Isaac, beautiful bride Rebekah, brother-in-law Laban looking to make a deal, and the unnamed servant, who along with the Centurion in the New Testament, is a fine example of humble faithfulness. The tale also featured a sacred oath between master and servant, a twelve hundred mile round trip journey to a distant land, water jugs, ten camels, prayers for discernment, and gracious desert hospitality. To Jacob and Esau, who were born in the following chapter, the story of their parent's marriage repeated around the campfire would have shaped their early views of God.



Rebekah, Acrylic on Canvas, 12x12, Steven Stuckey 2015

Questions for Reflection

1. Why might Abraham want Isaac to marry a woman from his own people rather than a Canaanite woman? Is there an application for you if you are seeking a marriage partner?
2. As you counsel students who are dating, what do you recommend that will strengthen their faith?
3. The first fruit of God's promise to Abraham was the birth of Isaac. Finding a wife for Isaac was the next logical step. What dream has God given you and does the dream have first and second steps?
4. Abraham's servant, Eliezer (see Genesis 15:1-2) is a model of humble faithfulness. As you read his story, what captures your attention? Take time to think and talk to the Lord about what you see.
5. What values and character traits does Rebekah reflect that would make her a suitable wife for Isaac?
6. Notice all the ways that the Lord is present in this passage.
7. Describe the relationship between Abraham and his servant and their relationship with the Lord. Do you have a similar relationship with a colleague or friend? If so, what can you do to strengthen that relationship?
8. What have you received from your parents that have shaped your life journey in a positive way? Thank God for those things.

Reading for Reflection

The choice between God and every other god is a real choice. Both make promises, both demand loyalty. It is possible to live by both. If there were no real alternative to God, all humanity would choose God. Indeed, God is the more difficult choice to justify in terms of provable results.

The chief difficulty is that God demands of us that we live by faith: faith in God, God's sovereignty over the future, God sufficiency for the present; while on the other hand, the various other gods whom we can serve appeal to us in terms of the things which we can see and the forces which we can calculate. The choice between the life of faith and the life of sight is the choice between a God whom only faith can apprehend and gods whom one has only to see to understand.

D.T. Niles in The Bible Through Asian Eyes

Thus to be a believer today is to live in a certain moral loneliness. To sustain faith today is not to vote with the majority, but rather to be what sociologists term a cognitive minority, that is, to stand outside of the dominant consciousness. One can no longer simply roll with the flow of one's own particular community, even one's faith community, if one wishes to have a living faith... Even within our churches it is easier to have a faith in Christianity, in a code of ethics, in Jesus' moral teaching, in God's call for justice, and in the human value of gathering as a community, than it is to have personal faith in a living God. Too often what we have, in fact, is not Christianity but an ideology of Christianity.

Ronald Rolheiser in The Holy Longing, page 216-217

Too many of us increasingly live our lives according to some external narrative that we think represents "success" or "acceptance" but has little to do with who we really are. In other words ordinary Americans are becoming more and more like politicians. That's right; the very profession we claim to despise has turned into one of the templates for modern life... What has changed is that the outer-directedness of politicians— their relentless need to be in touch and feed off other people—is now leeching into the larger culture. Technology is shaping the change... It used to be that only people in professions like politics, show business and sales dealt with scores of people each day. Now anyone with email does. And because Americans frequently change jobs, they are constantly selling themselves—just like politicians. Much of this outer direction is fine; the coiled ambition helps productivity and brings at least some people the sense of connection they crave in their lives. But these are different lives than led by earlier generations—stretched thin between outer and inner selves, self-absorbed without being self-knowing. The search for spirituality and meaning now underway in so many places must be some reaction against the soullessness of the backslap and the speed dial, the impossibility of "multitasking" what really matters.

Jonathan Alter in "Newsweek", August 23, 2004, page 29

Benediction

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy spirit, that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy.
Augustine of Hippo (Algeria/ 354-430)



Abraham's Servant, Acrylic on Canvas 12x12, Steven Stuckey 2015