

Wonder Woman Got It Right  
A Sermon on Rebekah and the Faithfulness of God  
The Rev. Dr. Pamela Dolan  
Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67  
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Most of you probably know that the one movie that has really taken the country by storm this summer is Wonder Woman. It's already been the subject of more articles and podcasts and internet memes than you can shake a stick at, and I won't be surprised if one of these days it's the topic for someone's doctoral dissertation. One thing that really seems to inspire audiences is Wonder Woman's motivation. She is not an edgy, ironic, tormented superhero, but a sincere and almost naïve one. Diana Prince is not haunted by loss, like Spider Man, or driven by revenge or a kind of vigilante spirit, like Batman. Rather, she is both an adventurer and a person who seeks to protect the least among us. I'm paraphrasing a little, but for me the most powerful line in the movie is, "It isn't about what they deserve. It's about what you believe. And I believe in love. Only love will truly save the world."

Thinking about this new version of Wonder Woman helped me gain some perspective on today's story from Genesis. Much of what is happening on the surface here can be pretty distracting to a 21<sup>st</sup>-century audience. What we are likely to see is an arranged marriage unfolding before our eyes, with some weird practices around marrying within the same bloodline and the role of servants in carrying out their master's wishes, even when it comes to being a matchmaker. But I can't believe that that's what the authors and editors of Genesis wanted us to focus on. Those things would have been the givens, the cultural norms for them, it's just that they are so foreign to us that they tend to obscure the story's very important emphasis on the character of Rebekah, her courage and faithfulness, and also, ultimately, on the faithfulness of God.

We may need to go back a little first to put this story in context. The last few weeks of readings have hit on some of the highlights of the long cycle of stories about Abraham, who is considered the father of all three of the world's great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We began with God's promise that Abraham's wife Sarah will bear him a son even at her advanced age, then we saw how God intervened on behalf of Hagar and Ishmael after they have been evicted from Abraham's household, and then last week the story culminated in the binding of Isaac, where again God intervenes to prevent the death of a child and to ensure that Abraham's family continues on to a new generation. One theme that runs through all these stories can be summed up in the simple phrase, "The Lord will provide." Whatever hardship or difficulty Abraham and his family encounter, the God they worship faithfully keeps his promises to them, providing whatever is most necessary and life-giving in their hour of need.

Today's portion of the story occurs several years later; Isaac is all grown up and his mother Sarah has just died. It is time for him to marry and settle down, but he is wandering around in regions where no suitable wife will be found. Abraham sends out his servant to find a wife for Isaac, and his servant proves himself worthy of the job, eager and loyal and on the lookout for signs everywhere he goes. Ultimately, though, it is Rebekah who is revealed to be the

most decisive character in the story, a person of agency and strength, a Wonder Woman in her own right.

One detail in the story that probably goes right by most of us is that when the servant asks Rebekah for a drink she offers to water his camels also. This is important for several reasons—first, within the story, because it is the sign the servant is looking for, the sign he needs in order to determine that “she’s the one,” and second, for the audience hearing the story, because it shows us that Rebekah is someone who takes initiative, a person with a generous and bold nature. It is also meant to be a shocking or possibly very funny detail—the servant has several camels, perhaps as many as ten, and to water even one camel can take 20 to 30 gallons of water.<sup>1</sup>

Now that first summer of Shepherd Farm I was one of several people who personally filled up empty milk jugs with water from our rain barrels and carried them up that little hill to the garden, and I can tell you that Rebekah would *indeed* have needed the strength of a superhero to draw 100 or more gallons of water from the well! I really do think this detail is supposed to give us pause, to help us identify Rebekah as someone extraordinary, much like Sarah being able to have a child when she is in her 90s. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are rightly known as the patriarchs of the faith, and Genesis shows us that the women they marry have important stories of their own, stories of strength, determination, courage, and faithfulness.

One of the great things about the new Wonder Woman movie is that we get a chance to watch a female hero find her place in life, and live into the role she was born to: a fierce warrior defending the weak and oppressed. Rebekah, too, seems to be a person who knows that she has a mission in life, that God wants to use her for an important purpose, and who recognizes that that purpose will not be fulfilled if she is merely a passive bystander. And this is the point: by taking initiative every step of the way, Rebekah reminds us that being faithful and trusting in God sometimes looks a lot like creating opportunities and not waiting around for things to happen to us or for us.

We are all part of God’s plan. Scripture is clear that God uses people to carry out his desires for creation, *and also* that we all have the choice of whether or not to be willing participants, to say “yes” to the divine invitation. Rebekah said yes. Yes to a stranger seeking a drink of water. Yes to his thirsty camels. Yes to setting out to an unknown place to begin a new life with someone she had never met. Yes to a man who turned out to love her deeply and for the rest of his days.

“God will provide” is not an invitation to fatalism, false humility, or apathy. When Abraham and Sarah were in need of heirs, God provided sons. When Hagar and Ishmael were dying of thirst, God provided water. When Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, God provided a ram instead. Most of the time, the way God provides is through us. We can’t let the fact that we are flawed, ordinary human beings stop us from doing our part. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel and Leah were flawed, ordinary human beings as well. They were not superheroes, and yet God provided them what they needed to do extraordinary things. God made outrageous promises them and then God kept those promises. As it was with them, so it is with us: God is not faithful to us because we deserve his faithfulness, rather God is faithful to us because it is in God’s nature to be faithful. As Wonder Woman herself said, it isn’t about what we deserve. **It’s about love.** God’s love, working through us, really is the only thing that will truly save the world. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2139](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2139)