

## Midweek Meditation – Week of September 2, 2020

### Genesis 21:22-34

You may remember from last week that we only covered the first part of Genesis 21. We talked about the birth of Isaac, and how Ishmael and Hagar were sent away because the inheritance of Abraham was truly designated by God to be only for Isaac and his offspring. Isaac and his offspring would be God's chosen people. You may remember that the birth of Isaac was the fulfillment of a promise that had been a part of Abraham and Sarah's journey with God for many years and through many experiences. While God promises that He will make a nation out of Ishmael's descendants, the promised land of Israel was only for Isaac, and only his line of Abraham's people.

In today's passage, we come to the place where, for the first time, Abraham and Sarah settle in one place. Up until now, the journey of Abraham has been that of a nomad. He and his community moved around so as to find land where there was enough water that would support the people and the livestock that were a part of his community. In this passage, Abraham and his community have dug a well, which means that they intend to stay here for a while.

Now in order to understand this passage, we have to think back a couple of weeks to the last time that Abraham encountered Abimelech. You may remember that Abraham was untruthful to Abimelech. He told him that Sarah was his sister, and that created a very big misunderstanding between Abraham and Abimelech. At the end of that story, as part of their reconciliation, Abimelech tells Abraham, "My land is before you; live where ever you like." It appears now that Abraham chose to accept Abimelech's invitation to live wherever you like. So, Abraham settled in a place about 40 miles east of Abimelech's palace on the edge of Abimelech's kingdom. He dug a well, and started to put down roots in a place that was called Beersheba. Soon after Abraham settled there, there is a little dispute between Abraham's people and Abimelech's people. It turns out that some of Abimelech's people didn't understand, or didn't respect, or care about this arrangement that Abraham and Sarah were allowed to live where ever they wanted to in Abimelech's kingdom. So, some of Abimelech's servants had seized the well that belonged to Sarah and Abraham and their people. So as a response to the news of this dispute, King Abimelech got on his horse and came and asked Abraham, "What's going on here. How come there is unrest between your people and my people?" And Abraham explains that the dispute is over the well that was dug by Abraham's community.

Now, here is what is really going on in this situation. Abimelech still remembers that he got chewed out by God during that whole situation about Sarah in their last encounter. Abimelech has no interest in making Abraham unhappy, because Abraham has power and wealth, and God is on Abraham's side. So, Abimelech says point blank, "God is with you in all that you do". But, up until now, Abraham has not proven to be the most trustworthy and honorable person to deal with. Abimelech was not sure he could trust Abraham, because not all that long ago, Abraham told Abimelech that Sarah was his sister. So, in this passage, Abimelech is seeking some assurance that there is no deception involved in this case where Abraham is complaining

about the well. He wanted to avoid the deceit that was part of their last encounter where Abraham tells that lie that Sarah was his sister. So, Abimelech says, "Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal with me falsely." "Show me, and the country where you are living as an alien, or in other word's rent free, the same kindness that I have shown to you." And Abraham says, "I swear it." After Abraham gives the assurance of honesty to Abimelech, he then explains that the cause of the disagreement has to do with the well. Abimelech then goes on to say, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I just heard about it today." In other words, because he is still a little afraid that he might incur God's wrath if he crosses Abraham, he sort of says let's just be real clear about one thing, this was not my fault. I didn't even know about it until today. Abraham here recognized that he has been guilty of deceiving Abimelech in the past. He also, I think, realizes that the king had been generous to him. He gave him permission to settle here in this place without any real price set on the land that he had chosen to settle. So, Abraham brings a little peace offering. He brings sheep and cattle and the two men made a treaty. Then Abraham sets apart seven ewe lambs from his flock. Abimelech asks Abraham, "What are these seven ewe lambs for, we already made a treaty." Abraham says that the seven lambs represent an oath, that I and my people indeed dug the well. It was an extra assurance of Abraham's truthfulness. A seal of his own integrity. And that was when this place was actually named Beersheba, which means, "well of oath," or "well of seven," which is a number symbolic of that which is Holy. Thus, Beersheba was named recognizing this treaty made between Abraham and Abimelech.

So, what do we take from this passage that we have chronicled, about the treaty between Abraham and Abimelech? Abraham, I believe, has to acknowledge in this passage, that he has made some mistakes in the past. He lied twice by telling those around him that Sarah was his sister. And then he came to the place where his integrity and trustworthiness and his honesty were justifiably called into question. That he lied is not in question. But if we try to think about why he lied, each time, it had to do with fear. And if we think about that, fear has compromised the faith of each and every child of God. So, we can have compassion for the fact that Abraham lied in the face of fear. But let's think about the implications of this story on our actions and on our ability to tell a neighbor about the word of God. We see here where Abraham, the father of our faith compromised his faith and credibility enough so that he had to take actions to repair his credibility with Abimelech. So that means for us, on Wednesday when we are dealing with an associate at work, or on Saturday when we are letting our hair down at a wedding celebration, our words and actions can make a difference in our ability and effectiveness as God's witnesses and the Lord's servants. We also learn that, in the event that we do make a mistake with regard to our integrity or our behavior because of fear, or weakness or self-indulgence, we can repair the damage to our reputation and our ability to witness, by turning back to the righteous path that God has given us. I leave you to think on this. If Abraham can repair his ability to witness to his faith to the world after making some mistakes, and if Paul can change from Saul the persecutor to Paul the Apostle. Then with the grace and mercy of Jesus' loving sacrifice, you and I can return from any mis-steps we might take to the path of righteousness. From the path of righteousness, we can share God's love, and shine God's light into the world around us. Let us pray...