

Deep Roots

Steadfast Love

Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell

October 24, 2021

Open in Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit into your gathering, giving God praise for your community and this journey of discovery and connection.

Gather

If you have encountered the story of Issac and Rebekah before, what about this story is the most memorable for you? What new insights or understandings are you looking for in their story?

Listen, Converse, Imagine

Read together Genesis 24

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, 'Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac.' The servant said to him, 'Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?' Abraham said to him, 'See to it that you do not take my son back there. The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, "To your offspring I will give this land", he will send his angel before you; you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.' So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and

departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was towards evening, the time when women go out to draw water. And he said, 'O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. Let the girl to whom I shall say, "Please offer your jar that I may drink", and who shall say, "Drink, and I will water your camels"—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.' Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder. The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. Then the servant ran to meet her and said, 'Please let me sip a little water from your jar.' 'Drink, my lord,' she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and

gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, 'I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.' So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.

When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, and said, 'Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?' She said to him, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.' She added, 'We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night.' The man bowed his head and worshipped the Lord and said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness towards my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin.'

Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring. As soon as he had seen the nose-ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, 'Thus the man spoke to me', he went to the man; and there he was, standing by the camels at the spring. He said, 'Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside when I have prepared the house and a place for the camels?' So the man came into the house; and Laban unloaded the camels, and gave him straw and fodder for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. Then food was set before him to eat; but he said, 'I will not eat until I have told my errand.' He said, 'Speak on.'

So he said, 'I am Abraham's servant. The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. My master made me swear, saying, "You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son." I said to my master, "Perhaps the woman

will not follow me." But he said to me, "The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful. You shall get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father's house. Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred; even if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath."

'I came today to the spring, and said, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, 'Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,' and who will say to me, 'Drink, and I will draw for your camels also'—let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son."

'Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, "Please let me drink." She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, "Drink, and I will also water your camels." So I drank, and she also watered the camels. Then I asked her, "Whose daughter are you?" She said, "The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him." So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. Then I bowed my head and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left.'

Then Laban and Bethuel answered, 'The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you anything bad or good. Look, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken.'

When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the Lord. And the servant brought out jewellery of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they rose in the morning, he said, 'Send me back to my master.' Her brother and her mother said, 'Let the girl remain with us a while, at least ten days; after

that she may go.' But he said to them, 'Do not delay me, since the Lord has made my journey successful; let me go, that I may go to my master.' They said, 'We will call the girl, and ask her.' And they called Rebekah, and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' She said, 'I will.' So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,
'May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes.'
Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took

Rebekah, and went his way.

Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, and said to the servant, 'Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?' The servant said, 'It is my master.' So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

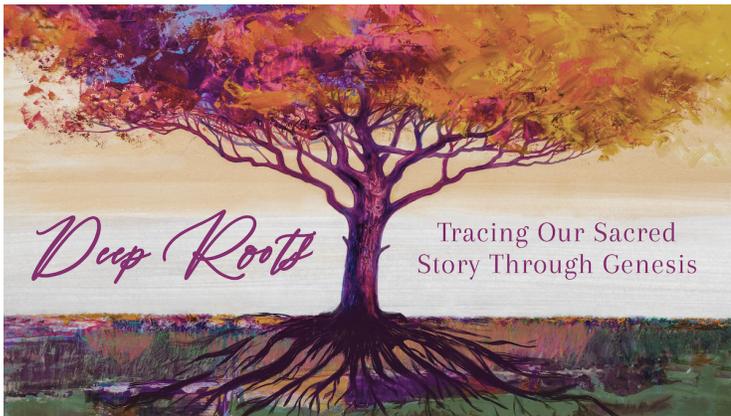
1. Where is God in this story? Do you notice divine absence or divine presence?
2. Who is the "hero" of this story? Who embodies faith/faithfulness?
3. Why do you think this story is included in the Bible?

Respond

As you think about how Rebekah's response to this opportunity played in the ongoing development of the story of the people of God, how might Rebekah's story influence your response to opportunities that arise in your life? What new insights do you have about God's character? What new thing is God inviting you to lean into?

Pray

Allow ample time to not only hear from one another how we can hold each other in our prayers during the coming week but also to pray together for God's grace to flow over each concern.



Deep Roots

The Lord Will Provide

Rev. Dr. Tom Elson

Missional Engagement Pastor,

October 17, 2021

Open in Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit into your gathering, giving God praise for your community and this journey of discovery and connection.

Gather

Listen to how Walter Brueggemann speaks of this.

Faith says 'yes' to the promise, which is no small matter. It also says 'yes' to the command which makes the promise only a promise. And then Brueggemann says, "The testings which come in history (and which are from God) drive us to find out whether we mean what we say about our faith being grounded solely in the gospel"

—Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*

Think of a time or circumstance when you leaned on a promise from someone, from God. How is that experience the same, how is that experience different?

Listen, Converse, Imagine

Read together Genesis 22:1-19

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." ⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And

he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering

instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."¹⁵ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶ and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous

as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." ¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

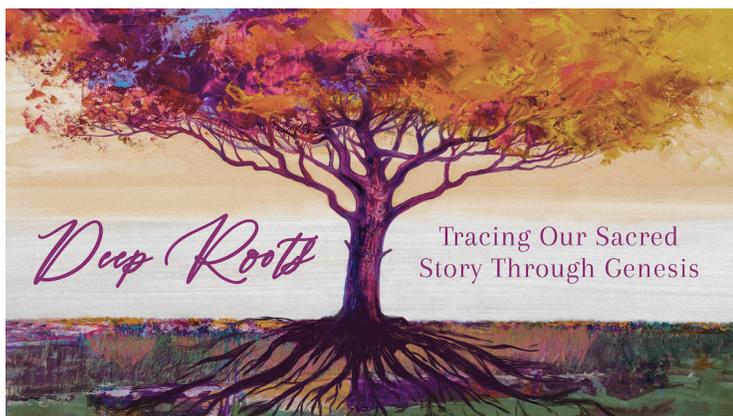
1. In what ways have you felt the testing of your faith? How is your faith being tested now?
2. Do you know people, or are you the kind of person, who can use suffering or testing to produce prayer and love in you rather than rancor and malediction? When has that path been easy? When has that path been challenging? What made it so?

Respond

Name some tangible ways we can support one another when our faith is being tested.

Pray

Allow ample time to not only hear from one another how we can hold each other in our prayers during the coming week but also to pray together for God's grace to flow over each concern.



Deep Roots

So Sarah Laughed

Michelle Vecchio-Lyzenga

Minister for Christian Formation

September 26, 2021

Open in Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit into your gathering, giving God praise for your community and this journey of discovery and connection.

Gather

"'Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?' The answer is given only provisionally in Genesis, always waiting to see if God can do what he says. Faith is a scandal. The promise is beyond our expectation and beyond all evidence. No wonder Sarah was frightened....The promise is given. But the community is called to a long wait." - Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*

Would you call faith a "scandal?" How is it similar to or different from, say, naive hopefulness or blind trust?

Listen, Converse, Imagine

Read together Genesis 18:1-15

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³ He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶ And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures[c] of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷ Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and

set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ¹⁰ Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" ¹³ The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'" ¹⁴ Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

1. If you're familiar with this story, how have you previously interpreted Sarah's laughter? Have 18 months of pandemic, national/global events, personal crises, etc. perhaps changed how you understand the matriarch's response?
2. When have you laughed at the promises of God?

Respond

In Sarah's story and ours, God's resolve to bring about God's promises isn't dependent on our ready faith. Where do you sense God is tenderly pointing out: "Oh yes, you did laugh"? What do you sense is God's invitation to you there?

Pray

Allow ample time to not only hear from one another how we can hold each other in our prayers during the coming week but also to pray together for God's grace to flow over each concern.

Deep Roots

Tracing Our Sacred Story Through Genesis

Community Group Covenant - Fall 2021

As we begin this fall community group experience, we do so with the desire to not only grow in our understanding of Scripture but to deepen our life with God and one another.

VALUES

We hold the following values as essential to our life together this fall:

CURIOSITY | TRY IT ON

We agree to be open to engaging others' perspectives. We will practice considering ideas from a posture of curiosity, focusing on asking probing questions rather than critiquing or defending. Our goal is not to walk away with one "right" answer but to learn with and from each other.

PARTICIPATION | STEP UP, STEP BACK

We agree to be mutual stewards of the life of our group, prioritizing our weekly gatherings and inviting every group members' participation, as they feel comfortable. We will be aware of group participation dynamics. If I am someone who tends to be a listener in group settings, I will consider stepping up to share my perspectives or questions. If I am someone who tends to talk a lot, I will consider stepping back to create space for others. (Think "three, then me.")

RESPECT | HOLD GOOD BOUNDARIES

We agree to practice respectful listening by not interrupting or talking over others. We agree to practice respectful sharing by speaking from our own experience ("I" statements) and refrain from giving advice, unless it is requested.

CARE | "OOPS" AND "OUCH"

We agree to assume positive intent in others while also acknowledging potentially negative impact. Anyone can say "ouch" if hurt or offended to stop the process from continuing and explore what's happening and why. Anyone can say "oops" to acknowledge their assumptions and/or to respond to another's "ouch."

CONFIDENTIALITY | SHARE ABOUT IDEAS, NOT PEOPLE

We want to process and discuss our learnings with others. However, we agree all sharing should be about concepts and experiences in the group, not specifics about what others have shared. We commit to hold in confidence the personal stories and comments shared in our community. Our bond of trust is essential to creating space for God's good work in each of us to take place.

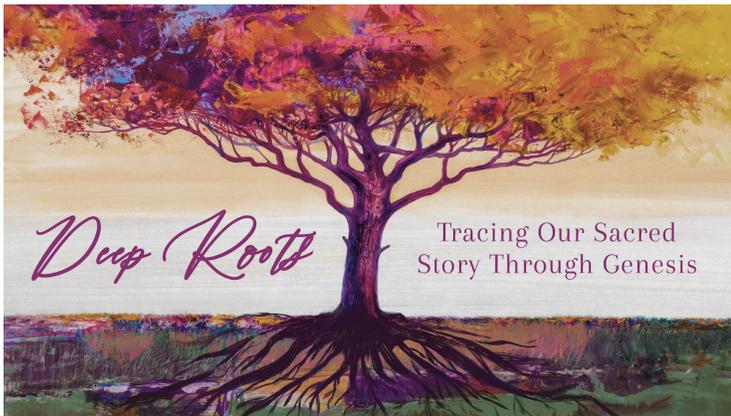
NORMS

We agree to meet on _____(day of week) from _____(am/pm) to _____(am/pm) for six/eight weeks, beginning _____ and concluding November ____ .

We agree to discuss how our group can serve together during the fall through

- Praying for our [Mission Partners](#)
- Other opportunities listed at [our website](#)

We agree to revisit our group covenant mid-way through our time together to assess how we are doing.



Deep Roots

On the Face of the Waters

Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell

September 19, 2021

Open in Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit into your gathering, giving God praise for your community and this journey of discovery and connection.

Gather

"The Bible is relentlessly realistic about the world and our situation in it. It does not pretend that things are better than they are, nor entice us to imagine that we can transcend the difficulties through some kind of spiritual superiority, innate or acquired. Nonetheless, a radical change happens as we read deeply.

—Ellen Davis from *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*

What radical change, or refreshed understanding, might you be hoping for in this listening of Noah's story?

Listen, Converse, Imagine

Read together excerpts from Genesis 5-8

5:1-2

This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them 'Humankind' when they were created.

6:5-8

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ⁶And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' ⁸But Noah found favour in the sight of the Lord.

6:13, 14, 17-19, 22

And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. ¹⁴Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁷For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²²Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

7:11, 17-22

In the six-hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. The flood continued for forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. ¹⁸The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. ¹⁹The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; ²⁰the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. ²¹And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings; ²²everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.

8:13-14,18-22

In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. ¹⁴In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. ¹⁸So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families. ²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. ²¹And when the Lord smelt the pleasing odour, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

²²As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.'

1. What is something that surprised you about this story that you never noticed before? What troubled you? What comforted you?
2. How would you characterize God's role in this story?
3. What is the nature of God's promise to Noah in verse 21?
4. What do you think is the "moral" of this timeless Biblical story?

Respond

Where do you sense God is calling you to change? What risk may God be asking you to take this week?

Pray

Allow ample time to not only hear from one another how we can hold each other in our prayers during the coming week but also to pray together for God's grace to flow over each concern.