

## To Explore New Worlds

Genesis 24:34-39, 58-67 Crossroads Christian Church

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 July 6, 2014 Pentecost 8A

Those of you who are Star Trek fans, and I know that you're out there, may recognize my sermon title today. During the opening credits of many series and movies, a dramatic voice would come on and say, "These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise. Its ongoing mission is to explore strange new worlds, encounter new civilizations, and boldly go where no one has been before."<sup>i</sup>

Now, what do those words, "to explore new worlds," have to do with our scripture readings, and with us at Crossroads Christian Church, on this Sunday two days after we've celebrated our nation's 238<sup>th</sup> anniversary?

"To explore new worlds" resonates with the spirit of our readings from Genesis over the last few weeks. Abraham and Sarah were called by God to explore new worlds, and we've heard parts of their journey.

Now, with chapter 24, we're at the Next Generation, to use another Star Trek phrase. Sarah has died. Isaac has grown up, and is an adult now. Their neighbors don't share Abraham's God and culture, so Abraham wants to find Isaac a wife from their own extended family in the region of Haran, many miles away. So they sent a faithful old servant to find a prospective bride. When the servant arrived at Nahor, he came to a well where women were drawing water. He prayed aloud for God's help. He asked that God would send him the woman who was right for Isaac, and would show him that it was the right choice by having her offer to give him water and to water his camels. In that prayer, although it doesn't come through in this translation, the servant appeals to God's steadfast love. *Hesed* in Hebrew, that's one of the great words used to describe God throughout the Bible, and these are the first times that the word appears. It shows that God's love is loyal, that God's love doesn't give up, and that

God wants and works for our good. But that's an aside. Sure enough, a lovely young woman shows up at the well, and offers the old servant a drink, and offers to water his camel—just the sign that he had asked God for! Could this be the one? It turns out that she was indeed of the same extended family, and so the servant lavishes her with jewelry, and asked her parents, can she come with me to be young Isaac's wife? Her family agrees, and Rebekah agrees to travel far from home to marry a man she has never met. What a beautiful act of trust and courage and faith. She left everything familiar, to begin a whole new life in a whole new place. For her, the kindness of offering a sip of cool water to a stranger marked the beginning of an opportunity to explore a new world.

Two days ago, we celebrated Independence Day. We remember with gratitude how our nation's founders were brave enough to pledge their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to transform us from colonies to a new nation. It was a radical experiment in its own day; they were up against the greatest military might in the world; and after they achieved independence, they had to hold the colonies together. Nobody had ever tried to establish a republic to govern such a large area before. Soon, immigrants and refugees from Europe, then other parts of the world, moved here to become part of that lively experiment, in the spirit of Abraham and Sarah, in the spirit of Rebekah and Isaac, they moved west into a new world.

There are, however, other worlds to explore than geographical ones. In our Gospel reading, Jesus was frustrated by the "We've never done it that way before" syndrome. People were scared of the new life that he offered. No matter what he would do, he couldn't please some people. The same people wouldn't follow John the Baptist because he had called them to repentance, because he was too strict and austere. But they didn't follow Jesus, because

he was too friendly to all the wrong people, people who were, they thought, outside the pale of God's love and mercy.

Jesus took them to task for being narrow-minded, self-righteous and rigid, for totally ignoring the fantastic things that God was doing in their midst. But then he thought that he would try one more time. He would give them a new invitation. They were used to the discipline of the law of Moses, and they accepted it like an ox accepted a yoke to pull a plow or turn a millstone. For they knew that this yoke, this harness, of the law, helped them to stay true to the word of God. But Jesus now offered them a new yoke, one at once more demanding and more satisfying than the yoke of the law.

Jesus was saying, I will help you carry your burdens. Learn from me. Find rest for your souls. William Barclay reminds us that Jesus was a carpenter. One of the major jobs of a carpenter was to make yokes for oxen and other beasts of burden. A yoke that was cut right, that was sanded smooth, that was light, wouldn't bite and tear the animal's shoulders; they wouldn't rub blisters; they would be comfortable like a favorite pair of shoes. And that was the kind of spiritual yoke that he was offering.

Jesus was offering a yoke, a way of discipleship that was rooted in the old ways, but that was also a new way, and led to a new world, a new relationship with a personal God. That way of discipleship could be frightening, because it turned everyday values on end; it made people suspicious. But Jesus promised—promises—to be with the disciples, protecting, comforting, and encouraging them—and us.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is one of the spiritual giants of our age. In his book *Made for Goodness* he expanded Jesus' invitation so it sounds like this.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Match your pace to mine, imitate me.

You are free to choose, you can choose to be like me.  
Wherever you are you can create beauty.  
Moment by moment, you can create joy.  
Instant by instant you can offer kindness.  
Now and always you can make me seen.  
You can be as I created you to be, the visible likeness of the  
invisible  
You will see as I will see.  
And your heart will break for all the sadness in the world.  
For all the hunger and pain.  
You will cry every tear with me and share every joy with me.  
You will see the sparrow fall.  
You will hear each dying blade of grass.  
You will hear every child's despairing cry and every father's  
despairing sigh.  
The terrified screams and hungry moans will be woven into  
the song of who you are and your heart will be broken and  
broken again.  
And then you know a heart of flesh and not a heart of stone.  
You will be alive!"<sup>ii</sup>

Just as Rebekah went on a journey to explore a new world of love and companionship, of being part of a new family of God's people, so Jesus invited the disciples, and invites us, to explore a new world as well. It's a world of trusting in the steadfast love of God, no matter what; of accepting a yoke of service and discipleship.

It's obvious that we live in a new time, with changes in the way we think and very different ground rules than those with which we grew up. It's tricky. It's not always comfortable. But just like those original followers, we at Crossroads Christian Church can learn to go where Jesus leads, to explore new worlds of love. How do we as a church explore new worlds? How do we follow the example of

Rebekah and accept the invitation of Jesus to explore new worlds?

Maybe by trying to be more open in our faith in Jesus Christ.

Maybe by learning the power of forgiveness—both in giving and receiving.

Maybe by accepting—really accepting—the steadfast love that God lavishes on us, and living in a more loving and gracious way.

There are new worlds out there to explore, my friends, and new worlds in here (heart) and there is a God who promises to go with us, to be there for us always. There is a Christ, a gentle, humble Savior, who offers us rest and comfort when the going gets tough. If we follow, we have the promise that God in Christ will be there with us. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Startrek.com

<sup>ii</sup> Tutu, Desmond & Mpho. Made for Goodness. Harper Collins, 2010. P. 40.