

SERMON 5th July 2026

Almighty God, your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world. May your people, illuminated by your Word, shine with radiance of his glory, that his love may be known in the world as he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, now and forever. Amen.

Who earns more money, women or men? Men, for the most part. That's certainly true traditionally, but nowadays women tend to earn more than men in their younger years, but from the age of forty onwards, as in years gone by, men start to earn more than women.

Men earn more than women, but who spends more, women or men? Women spend more, for the most part. Men spend more money on big expensive things like cars, houses and electronic equipment. But, when it comes to consumer goods like groceries, household items, childcare, family needs, clothes, the things that really matter, then women outspend men hugely.

You probably know all this, life teaches it, that men earn more than women and women spend more than men, in general. Consequently, we might conclude that women and men have differing roles in life, and that while they must rely on each other, nevertheless each must plot a slightly different path through life if they each want to move forward and strive upwards.

This tension between the different paths that men and women must plot through life, while at the same time finding that they must rely on each other, lies at the heart of the drama of the story of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs found in the book of Genesis; the story of Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebekah; Jacob and Leah and Rachel. This story of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs in Genesis is the origin story of the founding of the Israelite nation and its subsequent fate in the Old Testament, and then of Jesus and his fate in the New Testament, and then of Christianity and its development over two thousand years encompassing us, our culture, and our nation.

At the heart of the drama of this origin story lies a tension between men and women and their path and role through life. This morning, the character who reveals this is the matriarch Rebekah, who will become the wife of the patriarch Isaac, the son of the patriarch Abraham. The women in this origin story are not just passive wives of their husbands, they are central characters in a drama that shows how, if we are to move forwards and upwards following God, then we must have a broad and inclusive appreciation of human character and the different paths people take in their lives.

Firstly, this being the book of Genesis, which contains wonderfully constructed stories, the literature of Rebekah's story is illuminating. Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son, Isaac, and tells his servant how he should proceed. The servant takes advice also from God, which helps him identify the woman who will become Isaac's wife. But the servant, when he meets Rebekah's family and explains who he is and his mission, leaves out some things, exaggerates others, and changes the order of some events, not in a way that would make him obviously duplicitous, but rather for practical and diplomatic reasons.

The world doesn't always turn in our favour because we charge at it head on, sometimes we must be more subtle, like Abraham's servant. Such subtlety is not lost on Rebekah herself. Far from being a passive recipient of a marriage request, she is an active agent in her own future, and consequently an active agent who determines the course of history. In the part of the story we read this morning, she is shown to be confident, generous,

decisive, and hospitable. Rebekah is clearly not going to be just a wife for Isaac and a mother for his children, rather she is destined to play a significant role in the development of the story, a part that is entirely separate from the part of Isaac, her husband, the son of Abraham, Abraham who was chosen by God.

Later in the story, when she is pregnant and her twins are wrestling in her womb, Rebekah is confident enough and an active enough participant in her own life, to be the first person to seek out and ask God, even demand of God, an explanation for what is happening to her. The answer she receives changes the course of events and this family's destiny. God tells her that the elder of the two boys in her womb will serve the younger. Without involving her husband, who loves the older son, Rebekah is the one who ensures that this is the eventual outcome; that Jacob, the younger inherits his father's blessing at the expense of Esau.

We might think that the stories here in the Bible are about men, driven by their choices and their actions. But, while it is true that these stories revolve around the men – these patriarchs and their male offspring – so that clans, tribes and whole nations might be said to have been founded by them, it is often the characters and the choices of the women in the stories that determines the directional of travel.

This direction of travel is not only a consequence of the women like Rebecca being active agents in their own destiny, but they are also people who must overcome significant obstacles in life, remain faithful, and persevere for years despite terrible setbacks. In their stories, although they are loved by their husbands, they are confronted with years of childlessness before becoming pregnant. Their husbands take concubines who, in their turn, are women unloved but fertile. Strife ensues, and of the children that result from these relationships, husbands have their favourites who are not the same as the women's favourites. That requires some difficult choices to be made and life changing actions to be undertaken.

Last week we read the story of Abraham and Isaac in which Abraham had to prove his faithfulness to God in order that the story developed and God's plan was taken forward. This demand from God that Abraham and subsequently his male offspring prove themselves to be faithful requires sacrifices from them, often ever-increasing sacrifices, so that their future is a better one than their past.

But, while the men are proving their faithfulness through sacrifice, the women in the story have separate, but parallel challenges. They are the ones who are often faced with obstacles that need to be overcome, conflict that needs to be managed, and heartache that needs to be endured.

Husbands and wives in these stories are on a journey together, a journey with a destiny, which is to move forward, striving upward directed by God towards the Kingdom of God. But it is also a journey that is fated by trials, temptations, and tests. For those involved, both men and women, that forward momentum, and upward striving is only achieved by sacrificing what needs to be sacrificed, bearing what needs to be borne, enduring what needs to be endured, and acting in ways that displays character.

This is not just true in these stories, it is also true of us today, all these years later. Just as the women in the stories play roles that are different, but no less significant, to the role of their husbands, so today progress and development in our lives, in our communities, in our

institutions, and in our country doesn't always come from within what is established, institutionalised, and expected.

It is true also that even though God has blessed us through Jesus Christ with a vision of who we can become and a direction in which to head, a way to move forward, and a calling to strive towards, that doesn't mean that this moving forward and striving upwards is handed to us on a plate. Indeed, our calling doesn't happen unless we are prepared to make the sacrifices we need make, as the patriarchs did, and confront the obstacles and challenges, which we need to overcome, and face the relationship heartaches and troubles which need to be endured, just as the matriarchs did.

In the stories of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs, faith in God, that is a faith in the possibilities of the future, is not the end of a journey, it is only the beginning. That faith should not only lead us to walk along the way of life established by God, but it should also, by requiring us to face the challenges, make the sacrifices, and overcome the obstacles of life, encourage us to look for progress and development in unforeseen and unexpected places, and amongst unusual people.

Those unusual people are found amongst the men and women, all different from one another, whom we already know and those whom we are yet to know. Those unexpected places are all around us; they are places we've been to but dismissed, or have not yet been to. Those sacrifices that need to be made, challenges that need to be faced, and obstacles that need to be overcome are with us every day, or will come to us some day. If we are prepared to broaden our outlook and face life as we encounter it, then we will experience the blessings of God in the building of his Kingdom.

Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.