**Family Service Talk 16th October 2022**

**Genesis 26:1-6 + 12-33**

***26 Now there was a famine in the land—besides the previous famine in Abraham’s time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. 2 The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. 3 Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions.” 6 So Isaac stayed in Gerar…..***

***…. 12 Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. 13 The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. 14 He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. 15 So all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth.***

***16 Then Abimelech said to Isaac, “Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us.”***

***17 So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar, where he settled. 18 Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them.***

***19 Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. 20 But the herders of Gerar quarrelled with those of Isaac and said, “The water is ours!” So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. 21 Then they dug another well, but they quarrelled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. 22 He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarrelled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, “Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land.”***

***23 From there he went up to Beersheba. 24 That night the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.”***

***25 Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.***

***26 Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. 27 Isaac asked them, “Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?”***

***28 They answered, “We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, ‘There ought to be a sworn agreement between us’—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the Lord.”***

***30 Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. 31 Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully.***

***32 That day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, “We’ve found water!” 33 He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.***

This morning is a happy moment when the Family Service series of talks coincides with sermon series for the other services!! And thus the 3rd talk about Isaac: the little-known Patriarch fits very well with the Family Service series on Peacemakers in the Bible!! As you heard in the reading Isaac’s actions promoted a peaceful outcome with the wells!!

In the first two talks about Isaac, we had an introduction to him as the long-awaited son of Abraham and Sarah and a reminder of God’s promise to Abraham. (A promise of a land and a people …. and that God would bless Abraham with other nations being blessed through him.) Since that time, Abraham had obeyed God; moved to the country God would give him; waited until he was 100 years old to have a son with Sarah; been prepared to sacrifice his long-awaited son and throughout (mostly!), had trusted God.

God’s plan in all this was to plant the nation of Israel in Canaan where, as they grew in number and lived as God’s people, they would provide a God-centred, moral focal point amongst the nations …. A light in the darkness.

And Isaac, our quiet, unassuming hero this morning, is about to play his part in God’s plan. Clearly, with only Abraham, Sarah and Isaac up to this point, the nation of Israel was at the beginning of its existence, but we can already begin to see God’s plan advancing.

At the time of our reading, Isaac had married and been blessed with two sons – more of that next week. They were living in the south of Canaan at Beer Lahai Roi but, as we heard, there was a famine in the land and so Isaac and family went off to Gerar where Abimelech, the King of the Philistines, lived. In later times when we meet the Philistines in the Bible, they are a very ferocious bunch of people (think of the time of Samson and then David for example), but this small group was initially friendly to Isaac. At this time also God spoke to Isaac and told him to ‘stay-put’ and not go off to Egypt which might seem a very strange command, why would he go? However, I imagine that Egypt, with its fertile Nile area, must have been a very tempting destination for those in famine-afflicted Canaan. Also, Isaac’s father Abraham, had indeed relocated to Egypt in a previous time of famine…. But Isaac obeyed God and stayed in the land in which God had told him to live. And, as we heard in the reading, God confirmed to Isaac the promise he had previously made to Abraham. Indeed, the promises were even greater for Isaac with his descendants benefiting as well.

Promises …. ~ God will be with him ~ God will bless him ~ God will give Isaac numerous descendants ~ God will give all the land to Isaac’s descendants ~ Through Isaac’s descendants all nations will be blessed

And all this because Abraham obeyed God! What a wonderful moment this must have been for Isaac!

So, Isaac stayed in Gerar and indeed he settled down and planted crops, raised animals and …. God blessed him mightily! Life was good for Isaac, in fact life was very good …. And over time, he became very wealthy.

Sadly, the Philistines who were living nearby began to be very jealous of Isaac’s success and decided to take the law into their own hands in a very dramatic way – they blocked up with earth all the wells that Isaac was using to live there instantly removing Isaac’s source of water. Now when wells were dug in those days in that part of the world, it was a way of staking a claim to the land and Abraham had dug these wells years earlier and even made a treaty with the Philistines over them. And, of course, water was a vital and precious resource, especially in this area on the edge of the Negev Desert. Filling in the wells therefore was a very provocative move on the part of the Philistines and it was closely followed by King Abimelech asking Isaac to move away from Gerar as he was becoming too powerful ….. The Philistines were clearly feeling very threatened by Isaac’s presence.

Isaac could have argued or refused or made a fuss – after all he had done nothing wrong at all – but, as we heard, he simply moved away and camped in the Gerar Valley. He settled there and indeed opened up other wells (previously dug by Abraham and filled in by the Philistines!). Wells that clearly staked his claim to the land …. And therefore, a vital first step in the fulfilment of God’s promise to give the land to Abraham and now Isaac. In time Isaac even had another well dug, finding more fresh water….. he must have felt truly blessed by God.

But sadly, Isaac’s problems were not yet over. The local herdsmen came and claimed that the water from the new well was theirs. So…. Isaac moved on and dug another well. Again, the herdsmen said it was theirs and again Isaac moved on and dug yet another well. Nowhere do we read that Isaac got angry or argued with the other herdsmen, he simply turned away and went elsewhere diffusing what could have become a very violent situation. He compromised for the sake of peace. Finally, they dug a well and no-one came to claim it. Isaac knew then that God had given them room and that they would flourish in the land. Indeed, when he went to Beersheba, God spoke to him and said “Do not be afraid, I am with you and will bless you” (Gen 26:24)

So, Isaac settled there, dug a well, built an altar, called on God’s name and knew himself to be in the place of God’s choosing and blessed by God.

In time, King Abimelech came to visit – I wonder what Isaac’s first thoughts were when he saw who the visitors were?! What a relief it must have been when they said that they had come to propose a peace treaty with Isaac! But so much more than that … they had come because they saw clearly that the Lord was with Isaac and had blessed him.

What a witness Isaac had been throughout – staying in the land in obedience to God; turning away from conflict for the sake of peace; showing respect and humility in his dealings with the local people. Indeed, in the next few verses we read that Isaac held out a hand of friendship even more as he made a feast for the king, they ate and drank together and the king even stayed the night before signing the treaty and leaving Isaac in peace.

Isaac is not a well-known Biblical hero; in fact, he seems to have been a quiet and timid man (and indeed had lied to the king at times) but God still used him and blessed him. God’s grace is even greater and more evident in weaker, broken people – what a relief that is.

In fact, Isaac is a pattern for all people of God – a man who trusted and obeyed God and who knew he was loved and blessed by God. God’s goal was that the nations around his people would see them and know that God was with them by the way they lived in obedience to God. Those nations would then come streaming to God in worship. (Isaiah 2:1-4 and Zechariah 8:20-23)

We, as people of God, can be like Isaac…. ~ we don’t need to be well-known heroes ~ we know ourselves loved by God ~ we must trust God and obey his commands ~ our life must reflect God’s ways and we will know ourselves blessed by God.

In fact, Jesus describes clearly in the beatitudes how we should live and the blessings that God will then give us (Matthew 5:3-12) ~ blessed are the meek …. They will inherit the earth ~ blessed are the merciful …. They will be shown mercy ~ blessed are the peacemakers …. They will be called children of God ~ blessed are whose who are persecuted because of righteousness …. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven

We can see all these attributes in Isaac – let us seek to be these things ourselves – By God’s grace and in his strength – so that we too will be beacons of light and hope for those who don’t yet know God …. And we must pray that many (or at least one or two) will then come streaming to God. Amen