

The Allegiance of Love

[Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67](#)

[Psalm 45: 11-18](#)

[Romans 7:15-25a](#)

[Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30](#)

This weekend our country turns two hundred and fifty years old, and a lot of us are walking around with complicated feelings about what that means. Half our friends have served in the military, bleed red, white, and blue, and feel the flag in their bones. The other half worry that celebrating the nation too easily skips past its wounds, its unfinished business, its present political grief. Both halves often feel unheard by the other, and so both get louder. But underneath the argument is a question every one of us actually shares: what do we belong to? Whose are we? When our loyalties conflict, which one wins?

That is not just a civic question this week. It is the question underneath every text in front of us today.

Psalm 45 is a royal wedding song, written, scholars believe, to celebrate Solomon's wedding to an Egyptian princess. In the ancient world, marriage was not primarily about romantic feeling; it was about allegiance. For a man with 700 marital alliances and roughly 300 concubines, his particular allegiances had him stretched rather thin. Nevertheless, weddings forged alliances between disparate people groups, and the couple stood at the center of something much larger than themselves. The Psalm opens by telling the bride to forget her own people. That is a difficult statement for us to hear. But the point isn't erasure; it's reorientation. She is being invited into a new family, a new household, a new set of loyalties that will, the Psalm promises, extend and flow throughout the whole world. Marriage, in scripture, becomes the picture for what it means to leave one allegiance behind and be claimed by another. That's why marriage shows up again and again as the metaphor for the relationship between God and God's people:

because our bodies already know what it feels like to be claimed, to belong somewhere new, to be reoriented around someone other than ourselves.

This is a reorientation that, for the Psalmist and for Rebekah, would expand outward. The Psalmist reorients the family's history towards the future, "in place of fathers, O Kings, you shall have sons". This marriage will bless generations yet to come and will bless all nations and bring praise back to them for EVER. Equally, Rebekah's reorientation would carry Abraham's covenant forward, participating in the blessing of the world through bearing that promise in her own body.

The story of Rebekah and Isaac shows us what that reorientation actually looks like in a human life. In Jewish tradition, Rebekah is no minor character; she is remembered as a prophetess, one to whom God spoke directly, and it is her willingness to leave her own family that continues Abraham's covenant. The text gives us a portrait before it gives us a decision. Rebekah is a young woman from a wealthy household. She participates in family chores, the difficult labor of drawing water. She moves quickly and decisively throughout the story. She freely offers to water a stranger's ten camels, knowing full well that each camel might drink twenty gallons. She is generous and hospitable before she is tested. And when her family asks what she wants to do regarding the marriage proposal, an unusual deference for that world, she says yes. She had no detailed religious training. She knew almost nothing about Abraham's God. And still she agreed to travel five hundred miles into a land she had never seen, to join a grieving household, on nothing but an invitation and her own willing heart. This is the first place in the Bible that love is named between a husband and wife, and it begins with someone choosing a new allegiance freely, without hesitation, without certainty about where it would lead.

That freedom is exactly what Paul says he does not have. "I do not do the good I want," he writes, "but the evil I do not want is what I do." Paul knows what allegiance he wants to claim. He simply cannot make himself live it. Where Rebekah moves toward the new

family with open hands, Paul finds himself in chains he didn't choose and can't break by trying harder. And this is worth sitting with, because it is true of more than personal sin. It is true of our national allegiances too. We want to love our country well, honestly, without illusion and without cynicism. And many of us find we can't quite manage it. We default to tribe. We flatten the people who disagree with us. We let our politics do our believing for us. Paul's wretchedness is not a problem unique to the first century.

So how does the reorientation happen, if not by willpower? Not by escaping our bodies or our histories, Paul says, but by something done to us: "thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is where resurrection's power becomes poignant. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that reaches into Paul's bondage and Rebekah's invitation alike and makes a free response possible where one didn't exist before. Resurrection is not a doctrine we affirm occasionally. It is the ongoing claim that God can make alive in us what sin and fear and tribalism have left for dead, including our capacity to love people, and a country, honestly.

Jesus puts it more simply: "Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say there is no yoke. He doesn't say the burdens of citizenship, of family, of history, simply dissolve. He says a properly fitted yoke lets us carry what's actually ours to carry, instead of the version we've been hauling around on our own strength. Entering this new family doesn't erase our old ones. It doesn't erase previous allegiances. It reorders them. Christ becomes the allegiance that all our other allegiances answer to.

That has power for this weekend in particular. If our deepest loyalty belongs to the kingdom of God, then no national story, however beloved, gets to be the final word on who we are or what we owe each other. That should unsettle the friend who treats the flag as holy. It should equally unsettle the friend whose criticism of the country has curdled into

contempt for the people who love it. Neither posture survives an allegiance to a kingdom built on people from every nation reconciled to one another. The freedom Christ offers isn't freedom to disengage from our country; it's freedom to love it the way Rebekah loved a family she'd never met, with open hands, without needing it to be either perfect or worthless.

We are not promised an escape from the hard parts of this life, whether that's Paul's wrestling or our nation's unfinished work. What we are promised is company on the road, a family broad enough to hold disagreement without dissolving into it, and a future that does not depend on us getting it all right. Rebekah didn't know where the road would lead when she said, "I will go." She went anyway, because something in her had already been claimed.

In a few minutes we will come to the altar, the place where our deepest allegiance gets enacted rather than merely declared, where citizens of every kind of nation kneel as one family and are fed by one bread, one body. Whatever else is true of us this weekend, that is the allegiance that holds.

May we be a people who allow Christ's resurrection power to do its work inside us. A people actively living into our allegiance to Christ, freely choosing one another. And may we use our freedom in Christ and the freedom our nation provides for the benefit of others, extending the family beyond ourselves, to bless the whole world.