

Dear Friends

There's some funny stuff in the Bible.

Did you know that there are three stories of some of the heroes of the Old Testament pretending that their wife is their sister for fear of being killed? It sounds like something straight out of a Shakespearean comedy! But there they are: in Genesis 12, Abraham pretends to Pharaoh that his wife is his sister, and then he carries off the same ruse in Genesis 20 to Abimelech – Sarah, his wife, is clearly a lucky lady to have such a courageous husband! Then, like-father-like-son, in Genesis 26 Isaac also pretends that his wife is his sister when he meets Abimelech! (Hopefully not the same Abimelech – it could have been a title rather than a name).

It's a tale of human failing and God's mercy and unfailing care for his people that carries on in different ways throughout the Bible. It struck me, though, that this wife-sister thing could be a really useful challenge for us too in our faith.

I have both a wife and a little sister. My sister is very nice and I love her, but I didn't get to choose her (in fact one of my earliest memories was telling my parents that if she was born a girl, I'd put her in the bin!). My wife, on the other hand, I totally chose – I practically begged her to marry me! (and, for the record, I'd do so again).

When they felt threatened, Abraham and Isaac both moved from being open about their companion of choice, suggesting instead that they were born this way. Their companion became expendable and replaceable for them as both wives were taken off into the household of others. Wives become sisters as husbands become chickens. Not great! Certainly not romantic or heroic!

I suppose my question is for us to ponder, taking this as a picture of our faith: All of us have chosen our faith; none of us was born with it as an add-on. Our faith is therefore more like a spouse than a sister. But the question is, when we feel under pressure, or when challenged about why we go to church, or when something 'better' comes up that Sunday, does our faith-wife become downgraded to a faith-sister? Do we heroically cling proudly to our choice to follow Jesus to the end, or do we suggest that this is really a cultural thing we were born with that can be set aside for a time when it seems convenient?

We know from the rest of the Bible, that Jesus regards the Church as his bride: God chose us and will never set us aside. The question is, for each of us, do we live out that faithful matrimony, or do we act like Abraham and Isaac, downplaying our choices whenever we feel there's an advantage to be gained? Let's follow the example of our faithful saviour, Jesus.

Steve