

Digging Up

Sarah and Abraham built altars
and dug wells

One jutting bluntly to heaven,
Pushing a prayer up, pulling something down
One below, sinewing down to coolness,
Pushing down a vessel, pulling something up

As she lay at night in her cooling tent
did barren Sarah dream of digging, hand over hand
through sand that falls in on itself in a silent stream
Until she could awaken and grasp Abraham's hand in sleep?

And did Abraham shudder with premonition
when he judged just how much body weight
his newest potent pile of rock could accommodate,
A terror shaken off only as Sarah brings him a ladle of water?

I suppose it's harder, and takes far longer
to dig a well than to build an altar
But then again, you have to grow the sacrifice,
feed it and water it from the well for a very long time

So maybe it's about the same,
Deep or high
And maybe in the covenant drudgery of digging
Sarah and Abraham unearthed a few stones for the holy table built elsewhere.

And maybe they found that
When properly wedged together
Still dark and wet and new to the sun
They don't even try to wriggle free

But stay, poised forever,
faces to God

—Joanna Applegarth Hancock

This poem won second place in the 2007 BYU Studies poetry contest.