

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
June 21, 2020- 3rd Sunday After Pentecost, 7A
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac. †

The opposite of love is not hate... its fear. And fear is the root of so much that is evil in this world. Fear is the driving force behind power in society, in our economy and increasingly in politics and government.

From the moment we are born into this world, we learn to fear... to fear things around us... to fear what is different from us... to fear the stranger. Those in power within society, since the beginning of civilization— from the time of Abraham and Sarah, through that of the Roman Empire when Jesus walked among us, to the present day— those in power have long recognized the power of fear to divide people, and to ensure conformity to the structures of society, the status quo... even when it does not serve our best interests.

And Jesus makes it clear in today's Gospel that fear among his disciples will lead to failure...

It's easy to feel forgotten and abandoned in the midst of the chaos that exists in the world... and become even more afraid when we try to fit into 'the system' (the *cosmos*) that seems to prevail. He warns, 'those who think they've found their life in this world will lose it and those who lose it for my sake will find it.'

He is honest about what will happen, predicting conflict and suffering ahead... But gives hope by referencing small sparrows, seemingly minor in the scope of things, yet precious and important to God. What really matters is simplicity, vulnerability and dependence on God, as exhibited by the sparrows... not dependence on men, or powerful figures in our society... dependence upon God. And this will certainly lead to suffering, to shame and humiliation, and opposition from the world and the prevailing powers.

The passage we heard from Genesis today conveys the same message. I found it striking, given our present societal conflicts over racism and inclusion... it is the story of the exile of Hagar and Ishmael.

I wonder, what is the motivation behind their exile?

The story depicts Ishmael 'mocking' Isaac... yet the HBW word here *metsacheq* also means 'to laugh and play.' It is the root of the name Isaac. Some scholars read it that Ishmael was joyfully laughing with his half-brother, enjoying their relationship. Whatever was going on, it's clear that Sarah was upset by it... there was fear. And as a result, Hagar the slave and her son Ishmael are cast out and abandoned. But God does not abandon them. God hears the cry of Hagar... her suffering brings redemption. According to these Hebrew Scriptures, her son becomes that father of great Arab and African nations... nations that are different from Israel. The story

emphasizes that God's love goes beyond communities and races... beyond Sarah's family, beyond Israel. God's loves the Hagers and Ishmaels of the world as much as the Sarahs and Issacs. God loves those who are different, and those who are most vulnerable. God loves the Hagers and Ishmaels of the world, and so should we.

To be disciples of Jesus is to take on Jesus' way... the way of love, not fear... the way of the Cross. To be true disciples is to identify with the marginalized (slaves, rebels, poor) in society... to accept and embrace those whom the powerful deem unimportant, the Hagers and Ishmaels of the world. Remember his words, "those who lose their life for my sake will, in fact, find it."

Recognize the façade of human power and power struggles... call out the hate mongers and understand that their actions are about fear, not love. Disciples of Jesus Christ understand the only answer to fear is love.

Do not fear... 'nothing is hidden which shall not be known... what I speak to you in the darkness tell in the light.' In other words, the truth will set you free.

Recognize God in everyone around you... embrace the truth of God's presence in this world, which is manifest not by power or popularity, but through mercy and compassion. We are called by Jesus not to give into fear, but to work toward fulfilling God's mission of love and reconciliation and to allow the Good News of Jesus Christ to shape our lives and turn us... from rejection to acceptance, from doubt to faith, from fear to love.

God loves the Hagers and Ishmaels of this world, and so should we!

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