



Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

Deacon Glenda Empsall

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

God of love, who Jesus called Abba, Father, help us to be your faithful and obedient servants, that the whole world may know you and share your love. *Amen.*

Today is Fathers' Day. Wishing a wonderful day to the dads, granddads, uncles, and all fatherly figures who step up, inspire, mentor, guide, and support those of the younger generations. May you celebrate and be celebrated today!

As we read the bible, we meet quite a few fathers, including (but not limited to): Adam, Noah, Abram (later named Abraham) and his 2 sons Ishmael and Isaac (who each "fathered" nations), Jacob (later named Israel, and who was Isaac's son and the father of 12 sons, after whom the 12 tribes of Israel¹ are named), Joseph (Jacob and Rachel's son, the favored one, always wearing his technicolor dream coat), Moses, King David, and Joseph (earthly father of Jesus). None of them were "perfect" and some of them were deeply flawed. Biblical stories tell us of their triumphs AND their failures. All the tawdry bits are there.

Abraham is THE father from Genesis Chapters 11 through 25. He is one of the "Canonical Patriarchs" as are his son, Isaac, and his grandson Jacob. In today's OT lesson we read that Sarai (later named Sarah) commanded her husband Abraham to send his slave-wife, Hagar, and their son, Ishmael, away. This distressed Abraham. After all, it was due to Sarah's insistence that Ishmael was his son by Hagar, her slave. God told Abraham to do as Sarah demanded, and God promised that Ishmael would also be made a great nation. Still upset, hoping to ease their travel, Abraham provided bread and a skin

¹ [Reuben](#), [Simeon](#), [Levi](#), [Judah](#), [Dan](#), [Naphtali](#), [Gad](#), [Asher](#), [Issachar](#), [Zebulun](#), [Joseph](#), and [Benjamin](#)

of water for the journey and sent Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness.

When their water and food was gone, Hagar put Ishmael under a bush and moved away so she would not see him die. Hagar lifted up her voice and wept. “And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven.” God opened her eyes. She saw a well of water and refilled the waterskin. They were saved. “God was with the boy, and he grew up, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt².”

In next week’s OT lesson, God “tests Abraham,” telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. Abraham would have done it, but the Angel of the Lord stopped him. Many famous paintings of “The Sacrifice of Isaac” are hanging in museums around the world. Studying them closely is not for the faint hearted. One of them, by Rembrandt, made the cover of National Geographic, December 2001, to accompany an article, “Abraham, Father of Three Faiths.” The expression on Isaac’s face in a masterpiece by Caravaggio leaves no doubt in my mind that the father-son relationship was forever changed.

Abraham was not “perfect” and we acknowledge that it is human to make mistakes. Making mistakes seems to be embedded in our DNA. In bible stories when someone goes astray, often it happens when they are following their own ideas and plans instead of listening to the “still small voice” of God. The bible tells us that sin displeases and separates us from God. We know there are consequences when we “err and stray.” When we regret the mistakes, when we are truly sorry, we repent. With true repentance, there can be forgiveness. Giving and receiving forgiveness restores us to right relationships. Abraham put God’s will above his own plans most of the time. It was because of his priorities and his faith in God, not because of his good deeds, that Abraham was called “righteous.”

Some of you know that my older son is an Episcopal priest. Now, I’m not biased at all, but he is super smart, a terrific preacher, and he

² Hagar was an Egyptian.

doesn't agonize over sermonizing (like I do). I suspect that comes from being, as his early teachers said, "a very verbal child," his prowess on the debate team when he was in HS, and his passion for words, including scripture. Seminary was a plus. He also is a voracious reader, and when I heard a book review on Saturday, I knew he would be interested. Then I wondered if he might already have the book, so I sent him a text asking if he could "chat." He texted back that he couldn't call because he was a presenter at an all-day ordination an hour drive away from home. When he got home, he still had to write his sermon, "about Jesus telling us to hate our parents when it's Father's Day." I asked him if I could borrow that line. He didn't tell me no.

Trying to be supportive, I texted, "Could be worse, next week is the sacrifice of Isaac." He texted back, "I preach next week too. My rule is to preach the tough lessons, but children's chapel is on hiatus, and I'll have to be careful. There will be kids in the room."

We know that Jesus cared about children, women, and all those who were poor, marginalized or oppressed. Jesus was well aware of the dangers his followers would face from the powers that be; the Romans, and the religious authorities. He never downplayed the trouble they would encounter if they chose to be his disciples. Those powers accused Jesus of being from the devil.³ Jesus knew his disciples would have the same accusations leveled against them, and worse.

Jesus wanted the disciples to have their priorities straight – followers with eyes wide open. The disciples' commitment must be to faith. What should they be afraid of? Not of being a Jesus follower. Not of adversaries, who threaten to kill them. The body dies. The soul does not die. The work they will do is more important than life itself. It is better to die than to lose your soul. Because they follow Jesus, friends and even family will disassociate with them.⁴ Let them go.

³ Mt 9:34 and Mt 12:24-27 Jesus was accused of getting his ability to exorcise and heal from Beelzebub.

⁴ Micah 7:6 for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household.

Commitment to the Word of God over family is a command to the Levites in Moses's Final Blessing on Israel: "And of Levi he said, 'Give to Levi your [Thummim] lights and your [Urim] perfections to your loyal one, who said of his father and mother, 'I regard them not'; he ignored his kin and did not acknowledge his children. For they observed your word and kept your covenant.⁵'"

Jesus told his followers to pick up their cross and follow him. They did not know that Jesus would be put to death on a cross. Crucifixion was a public execution reserved specifically for slaves, non-citizens, and those who threatened Roman authority. Offenses carrying that penalty included sedition, treason, rebellion, highway robbery, piracy, and attempting to escape slavery.

In his book, Matthew – The Gospel of Identity,⁶ Michael Card writes, "We must embrace the foolishness of the cross to be wise, let go of our possessions to become wealthy and become slaves to be free. This is the radical reversal, the upside-down nature of the kingdom and the source of our new identities in him." Let us go and do likewise. God of love and compassion, for whom all things are possible, help us to be your faithful servants. May we hold Jesus in our heart and be his eyes, ears, hands and feet in this world. Help us to recognize and attend to the needs of those who are the most vulnerable. Amen.

⁵ Deuteronomy 33:8-9

⁶ Chapter 10, pg. 104