

3 Pentecost 2020

Gracious God, last night I saw a blessing pass me by, on its way to a stranger. I did not know who was to be blessed or why, but I could feel the warmth of the kindness intended. We live in a world of faces, most we never see, who are hidden chapters in a story we all share. There is no human who has ever lived, or will live, to whom we are not related. God's kinship is a bond of blessing between us and all who breathe. We are those we know as well as those we fear. We are the other to ourselves, and self in every soul we see. * Be present with us this morning as we offer our prayers and praises to you, in the name of Jesus, our Savior, and your Holy Spirit, our Comforter. Amen!

This prayer was written by Steven Charleston from his book "Hope As Old as Fire."

And it was the opening prayer from Friday night's Diocesan Service of **Reality, Lament and Hope**.

As Christians, as Episcopalians, we need to be aware of the realities that we find ourselves in. Sure, we can choose to focus on our own lives; trying to get back to the way things were as 2019 led into a brighter 2020. But For myself, I can't go back. Too many things have changed and honestly, I believe that we must **not** go back to the way things were. I believe that society must figure out what the new normal is and live into it. I believe that Christians must **start** at the new normal and move forward.

Concerning our readings this morning; I admit that I tend to gravitate first to the Gospel when deciding on what to preach about. And there is certainly a lot to consider here. But the reading from Genesis kind of reached out and grabbed me. It is part of the story of Sarai and Hagar.

What drew me to this was their relationship to each other. In the past, I simply read this passage from a Christian perspective. Sarai and Abram having a child in their old age who was named Isaac. Isaac the descendant of Abraham, Jacob, the descendent of Isaac; then Joseph, and so on all the way to Jesus. This is what we are taught from the time we all were young.

Hagar and Ishmael were a minor subplot.

In an article from US News called; Why Scholars Just Can't Stop Talking About Sarah and Hagar; Dueling mothers. By Julia M. Klein, Contributor (Jan. 25, 2008)

It reads in part:

"The Arab-Israeli conflict. The oppression of the underclass. Sounds like a roundup of headlines from the nightly news—if the media were in full swing back in biblical days. All of these timely issues can be found in the twist-and-turn-filled story of Sarah and her Egyptian handmaiden, Hagar. According to the biblical account, both women bear a son for the patriarch Abraham. From that starting point, scholars have gone on to explore varying (and sometimes contradictory) layers of meaning in this classic tale of family rivalry.

"On one level, this is the first example of surrogate motherhood," says Naomi Steinberg, associate professor of religious studies at DePaul University in Chicago and author of *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis* (Fortress Press, 1993). Hagar, a slave, is never asked to consent to bearing a child, so the narrative, Steinberg says, raises the timeless issue of "upper classes exploiting those with fewer options."

The article also brings out some very important points that we often miss as Christians.

“While Jews traditionally see themselves as descendants of Isaac, Sarah's son, Arabs and Muslims trace their lineage to Hagar and Ishmael. African-Americans have appropriated Hagar, impregnated by her master and cast out into the desert, as a symbol of the plight of the slave woman. Feminist scholars say the story reflects the male-dominated societies of the times—or that it misrepresents the cooperative relationships that more likely existed among women”.

The practice of a barren wife giving her servant to her husband as a second wife in order to produce an heir, was not an uncommon practice at the time. Although some have theorized that maybe Abram acquiesced a little too quickly to Sarai's request. Anyway, Ishmael was in fact Abram's first-born son and normally his heir. As we all know from the story, Sarah did not agree and neither did God. Isaac was to be his heir. Hagar and Ishmael were sent off into the desert and carried only what water and food that she could. It ends up being a story of privilege and favoritism.

I thought about this story and I know that folks have a lot of opinions **on this** topic of privilege and favoritism. Many do not think that either one is prevalent or relevant today.

I saw this on Facebook yesterday:

**No white person
alive today ever
owned a slave.
No black person
alive today was
ever a slave.
We can't move
forward if people
want to keep
living in the past.**

I would have to say that the above statements at face value are true statements. And I admit that at one point in my life, I felt the same way. But the issues are far greater on so many levels. We are dealing with gross inequality between those who are white and people of

color; between the poor, the middle class and the wealthy; those with adequate housing and those who are homeless or near homeless; those with good medical care and those who can't afford medical care; those with access to healthy food and those who go without. We are not living in a society where every person lives and moves on a level playing field. With our Black brothers and Sisters, that started with slavery, with our Indigenous Brothers and Sisters, it started with Colonization. Dr Martin Luther King Jr made the following comment concerning this: And I quote:



“ Our nation was born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian, was an inferior race. Even before there were large numbers of Negroes on our shore, the scar of racial hatred had already disfigured colonial society. From the sixteenth century forward, blood flowed in battles over racial supremacy. We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe out its indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or feel remorse for this shameful episode. Our literature, our films, our drama, our folklore all exalt it. Our children are still taught to respect the violence which reduced a red-skinned people of an earlier culture into a few fragmented groups herded into impoverished reservations.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

(End quote)

As recent as the 1930's, thousands of our Latino Sisters and Brothers were unwillingly deported to Mexico. Wikipedia reports that "The Mexican Repatriation was a mass deportation of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans from the United States between 1929 and 1936. Estimates of how many were repatriated range from 400,000 to 2,000,000.

{[1]:xiii[2]:150"} An estimated sixty percent of those deported were actually born in the U.S. and were US citizens.

"Because the forced movement was based on ethnicity, and frequently ignored citizenship, some scholars argue the process meets modern legal definitions of ethnic cleansing.[3]:6."

in 1933 the INS reported that the State of Michigan "sent" 1500 Mexicans to the border accompanied by an Immigration Service escort. Because these migrants were removed under a state-sponsored program it is unlikely that INS deportation files exist for them. Some were able to return to the U.S. later but many were never heard from again.

Peggy McIntosh is associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. As much as I hated to admit it, I understood what she wrote back in 1988 about male privilege. She said that;

"As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught **not** to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So, I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an

invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in women's studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?" end quote.

My Brothers and Sisters; Jesus calls us to Love, to be Love in this world. We can try and justify the atrocities that have been committed and are still being committed in this country against people of color by saying that **we are not** like that. Those of us who do participate in marches and protests cannot go back to our worlds as if nothing ever happened. It is true that God loves each one of us right where we are at. But I believe God does more than that. God reaches down and raises us up with undeserved Grace. We are all equal in God's eyes. We must find a way to see each other in the same way. I want to close with a prayer by our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry. It was the closing prayer used in Friday night's service of Reality, Lament, and Hope.

God of all power and love,
we give thanks for your unfailing presence
and the hope you provide in times of uncertainty and loss.
Send your Holy Spirit to enkindle in us your holy fire.
Revive us to live as Christ's body in the world:
a people who pray, worship, learn,
break bread, share life, heal neighbors,

bear good news, seek justice, rest, and grow in the Spirit.

Wherever and however we gather,

unite us in common prayer and send us in common mission

that we and the whole creation might be restored and renewed,

through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN!