

Third Sunday After Pentecost
June 21, 2020

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship: *Spirit of the Living God (UMH-393)*
Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me.

Centering Words:

Great are the works of God's hands, Wondrous are the blessings of Christ's love. Holy are the works of God's Spirit. (from *The Abingdon Worship Annual, 2020, 136*)

Affirmation of Faith: Apostle's Creed

Prayer of the Day:

For our fathers, who have given us life and love, that we may show them respect and love, we pray to the Lord...

For fathers who have lost a child through death, that their faith may give them hope, and their family and friends support and console them, we pray to the Lord...

For men, though without children of their own, who like fathers have nurtured and cared for us, we pray to the Lord...

For fathers, who have been unable to be a source of strength, who have not responded to their children and have not sustained their families, we pray to the Lord...

God our father, in your wisdom and love you made all things. Bless these men, that they may be strengthened as Christian fathers. Let the example of their faith and love shine forth. Grant that we, their sons and daughters, may honor them always with a spirit of profound respect. Grant this through Christ our Lord who taught us to pray: (*UM Book of Worship, 441*)

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word
O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Epistle Reading Romans 6: 1-11

Psalm 86

Gospel Reading Matthew 10: 24-39

Special Music

Old Testament Reading Genesis 21: 8-21

Sermon Are God's Blessings Exclusive?

Hymn *This is My Song (UMH, 437)*

This is my song, O God of all the nations,
a song of peace for lands afar and mine.
This is my home, the country where my heart is;
here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;
but other hearts in other lands are beating
with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,
and sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine;
but other lands have sunlight too, and clover,
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,
a song of peace for their land and for mine.

This is my prayer. O Lord of all earth's kingdoms:
Thy kingdom come; on earth thy will be done.
Let Christ be lifted up till all shall serve him,
and hearts united learn to live as one.
O hear my prayer, thou God of all the nations;
myself I give thee; let thy will be done.

Benediction:

God blesses all things. God blesses all people. God has blessed us. Go forth to be a blessing to all as we have been blessed, so all may know that they are blessed by God. Amen.

Response *God Be With You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)*

God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Genesis 21: 8-21

God's blessings: we all believe that God blesses us. God has blessed me in so many ways- a loving wife, a wonderful daughter, a great son-in-law, a great extended family, to return here to Trinity to be the pastor. I could go on and on but you all have better things to do than listen to me prattle on about how God has blessed me.

I hope that each of you can prattle on for hours about ways that God has blessed you. You may be able to see blessings even in situations that did not feel very much like blessings, such as losing a job that ended up freeing you for something better.

We all have been blessed by God in so many ways. But what about "them"? Sure, we expect God to bless us good Christian folk, but what about "them"? What about folk who may not be good Christians? What about people who don't go to church? What about people whose beliefs are different from ours? What about people who are different from us? There are people that don't seem to be deserving of God's blessings but are they? Does God bless them also or is God's blessings exclusive to us good Christian, church going folk?

The answer to this question may be seen in this story of Hagar and Ishmael. The impossible promise has been fulfilled. Sarah has born Abraham a son, Isaac. The next generation of the lineage that would become a nation blessed by God has finally arrived. The child has now made it through the perils of infancy and has been weaned. He has survived at a time when so many babies did not, and the probability of him growing into adulthood is great.

So, there is a celebration! Sarah sees the son of Hagar, her Egyptian slave woman whom she gave to Abraham so that he might have her son because Sarah was thought to be barren, playing with Isaac. Perhaps at that point she realizes that Ishmael, the son of the slave woman, is Abraham's first born. Ishmael would receive a double portion of the inheritance from Abraham according to the cultural norms of the time.

Sarah orders Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. Now the word translated as cast out has the meaning in a physical sense, sending away, which is played out in

this story, but it also has the meaning of to divorce. Sarah is ordering Abraham to divorce Hagar and no longer acknowledge Ishmael as his son. Thus her son, Isaac, would receive the full inheritance.

Now some may find what happens next somewhat disturbing. God tells Abraham to do what Sarah wants and send Hagar and Ishmael away. God says that it is through Isaac that he promised to make his offspring a great nation, not Ishmael.

That would seem to indicate that God's blessings are exclusive. God's blessing is upon Isaac, not Ishmael. God's chosen people will come through Isaac's lineage not Ishmael's. If we look at the genealogies of Jesus in both Matthew and Luke, we see that the lineage ran through Isaac, not Ishmael. So, God's blessings are exclusive. God's blessings are just upon us good Christian church folk.

And we white folk in the United States are particularly blessed. This was driven home to me Wednesday morning as I participated in a listening session that Cathy Jamieson, our DS, set up for us to hear the experience of our African American brothers and sisters. These were not thugs or gangbangers, but my colleagues, fellow clergy. We are blessed in that we don't have to have "that" talk with our kids, particularly boys, not the birds and bees but what to do if you are stopped or approached by the police. We are blessed that we don't have to worry about the day when our cute little boy is not longer perceived as a cute little boy but a threat because of the color of his skin. We are blessed that we don't have to tell our husband not to walk home from the garage after dropping off the car because you fear what might happen if someone in your neighborhood sees him walking in the neighborhood. We are blessed because our 15-year-old son did not receive a broken collarbone and busted nose by the police because they thought he was someone else. We are so blessed because we do not have to live in constant fear because of the color of our skin.

We are so blessed, and all too often we think that God's blessings are exclusively for us, just as it appears from this story that God's blessings were just for Isaac.

But wait, the story continues. God tells Abraham, "As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring (v13)." Even though Abraham casts Hagar and Ishmael out, in Hagar's moment of complete, utter, despair where she had given up hope, even as she left Ishmael under a bush and left because she could not watch her son die, God heard them. God heard

Ishmael's cries. God spoke to Hagar, the cast-off, discarded, Egyptian slave woman telling her, "Don't despair. Don't give up hope. I hear you. I will make a great nation of your son." God showed Hagar a spring of water and God was with Hagar and Ishmael. God blessed Hagar and Ishmael. God did make a nation from the lineage of Ishmael.

So, we see that God's blessings are not exclusive. God blessed both sons of Abraham. God blessed Isaac to become the nation of Israel, the Jews and later Christians. God blessed Ishmael through whom our Muslim cousins trace their lineage. Through God's blessings of Isaac and Ishmael three great religions trace their origins back to Abraham.

This story shows us that God's blessings are not exclusive to one particular religion or race. We see that God's blessings are upon all people.

God blessed the cast-off slave woman and her son. God blessed the 15-year-old black boy whose collarbone was broken and nose busted by police. God blesses the black men and boys who have to be extra cautious in interactions with police. God blesses the black folk who fear walking or jogging in their own neighborhood because someone might call the police at best or shoot them at worst, like Ahmaud Aubrey. God will bless that four-month-old cute baby boy, so hopefully he will never be seen as a threat because of the color of his skin.

God blesses all people. All lives matter to God. That is often a push back against the Black Lives Matter movement. Of course, all lives matter to God. God created all lives.

But did the lives of Hagar and Ishmael matter to Sarah? It really doesn't take much though to say no, obviously not. The only life that mattered to her was Isaac's. She thought God's blessings were exclusive to her son.

In these times of racial unrest we need to ask ourselves, do all lives matter to us? Do black lives matter to us? Do the lives of those African Americans matter to us? Not just life in terms of living and breathing, but also quality of life. Does it matter to us that a black pastor was arrested for "brandishing a weapon" because he was being threatened and assaulted by five white people? Does it matter that the sons and daughters of my clergy colleagues have to have a talk about what to do when approached by police so they do not become another statistic? Does it matter

that a four-month-old baby boy may grow up to be perceived as a threat because of the color of his skin?

In these times, we need to remember that God's blessings are not exclusive to us but God blesses all people. We need to remember that God made a great nation of both Abraham's offspring so they could be a blessing to all nations.

We can be a blessing by taking time to listen, to hear the pain and anger of our black brothers and sisters. To listen, not to argue, not to refute, not to excuse, but to understand, to understand that their experience, historically and now, is different from ours. To understand how it feels to walk by a statue of someone who fought to keep your ancestors enslaved.

It hurt to hear the stories of my colleagues. It may hurt to listen to the pain and anger of those who are different from us, but that is what we need to do! For us to really be a blessing to all people, to our black, Latinx, Asian, immigrant, brothers and sisters, we need to listen. Listen to understand. Listen to grow. Listen to change, not them but us.

As followers of Christ, the word of God made flesh, we are to be a blessing to all. As the church, the body of Christ, we are not just to be blessed but we are to be a blessing for all. Let us be a blessing by listening and hearing the cries of our brothers and sisters as God heard the cry of Ishmael. Let us be with them that we may be a blessing to them and they may be a blessing to us.

For God is the God of all people and God's blessings are not exclusive but excessive for all people.