

Tarves Parish Church - Sunday 21 June 2020



“Do not be afraid; You are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matt 10:31)

INTRODUCTION

A couple of weeks ago I suggested setting apart a special space where you might spend time with God, both on Sunday mornings either on zoom or with the written worship materials from the web-site, and during the week. Here I will be suggesting activities linking to this space each week.

The birds of the air and the hairs on your head: God knows every single one. You are valued. You are loved. Place a family photo on your table: this may be your immediate family, or those who are like family to you. Name them before God.

Praise CH4 160 Praise my soul the king of heaven (Omit v4)

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| <p>1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet thy tribute bring;
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who like me his praises should sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King.</p> <p>2. Praise him for his grace and favor
to our fathers in distress;
praise him still the same for ever,
slow to chide and swift to bless:
Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness.</p> | <p>3. Father-like, he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hand he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows.</p> <p>4. Angels, help us to adore him;
ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace.</p> |
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The Word of God: Genesis 21:8-21 Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, ‘Cast out this slave woman

with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.’ The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.’ So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, ‘Do not let me look on the death of the child.’ And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, ‘What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.’ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, 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 Egypt.

Reflection

The manse garden hedge is currently playing host to at least one family of sparrows. Unfortunately each time they try and land on the lawn they incur the wrath of one adolescent Westie pup. How dare these little sparrows land on his grass! Magnus would sit all day jealously guarding his territory and waging war with any birds who are foolish enough not to keep to their own domain, which as far as he is concerned is well above head height!! Magnus is of course only doing what is in his nature.

But that jealous guarding of territory is sadly not restricted to recalcitrant Westies. These traits can be seen in our own broken lives too. The Old Testament does not shy away from the reality of life. Today’s bible reading from Genesis tells the story of a jealous mother going to extreme lengths to protect her son’s inheritance.

There is a history between Sarah and Hagar. Sarah has treated her slave girl Hagar badly in the past. When Sarah cannot have a child, she gives Hagar to Abraham and Hagar becomes pregnant. Then it is Hagar’s turn to treat Sarah with contempt. But of course Sarah will always have the upper hand – Hagar is a slave and Sarah responds by treating her cruelly until the pregnant Hagar runs away. But God sends Hagar back to the safety of Abraham’s camp with the promise that she will have a son and through him many descendants even though that son will be at odds with his family. Back at camp Hagar gives birth to Ishmael.

When Sarah at last gives birth to Isaac, her jealousy spirals. She cannot bear to think that Ishmael might share in Isaac’s inheritance. She persuades Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Abraham initially refuses. He is distressed that he might be sending them and particularly Ishmael to certain death in the wilderness. But eventually, reassured by God, he gives Hagar some bread and water and sends them on their way. After wandering for some time in the wilderness, out of food and water, it seems that Ishmael is

on the point of death. Hagar places the boy tenderly in the shade of a bush and moves away as she cannot bear to see her son die. But the story does not end there because God hears Ishmael's cry. He opens Hagar's eyes. She sees a source of water. God offers her the means to save Ishmael. And God remains with the child as he grows up in the wilderness.

That story reveals human nature at its worst – in Sarah's jealousy and Abraham's inability to stand against it. And tragically this story is as relevant today as it has ever been. Pictures of mothers and children in refugee camps abound – driven out of their homes, people and families torn apart, as the powers that be go to war fighting over land and territory. And once again our attention has been drawn to the evil of slavery by the protests of the Black Lives Matter movement. We have been reminded of how our own nation benefitted from slavery. Then some of you may also be aware that tomorrow 22 June is designated Windrush day. On this day we remember or should remember those who arrived from the Caribbean and helped rebuild a country on its knees after two world wars - people who were subsequently treated so scandalously by successive governments, marginalised, deprived of rights, yet who continue to fulfil vital roles in society that have rendered them more susceptible to the current pandemic. And through all of this people who perhaps could and should have done more to prevent the situation have been caught on the horns of a dilemma calling out to God in distress.

But to return to the story of Hagar and Ishmael. If this story reveals the worst in human nature it also reveals something of the best of human nature and its resilience. One American theologian says of Hagar that she like, “many black women, goes into the wide world to make a living for herself and for her child, with only God by her side.” This way of reading the story gives dignity to Hagar and with her to all who experience injustice. And it promises that as they seek to make their way they can expect to find God with them.

And so we come to what this story tells us about God. Because this story has quite a lot to say to us about God. First of all we are told God hears and answers Abraham's distress as he cries out for Ishmael. God also hears the weeping of Hagar and the cry of Ishmael himself. And God opens the eyes of the one person who can do something about the situation. Hagar's eyes are opened both to the source of water which will save Ishmael's life and also to God's own life-giving presence in that situation.

In this story we find the God who hears the cry of all who call for justice. In the New Testament we find Jesus teaching about this same God who knows when every sparrow falls to the ground (even although they are two a penny), the God who has the hairs on our heads counted, the God whose promises are not only for those who have but also for those who have not, the God who asks that we lose our lives for him rather than stake a claim to our territory at the expense of the weak and the vulnerable. Here is the God to whom every life matters. And if every life matters to God then every life ought to matter to us. To whose plight is God opening our eyes today?

Let me leave you with the words of one modern hymn

*Who can sound the depths of sorrow
In the Father heart of God
For the children we've rejected
For the lives so deeply scarred?*

*And each light that we've extinguished
Has brought darkness to our land
Upon our nation, upon our nation
Have mercy, Lord.*

Pointers for Prayer

- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- The NHS, its staff in hospitals and GP practices as well as the other emergency services and volunteers
- The Government and Scottish Parliament and their advisers as they seek to guide us out of lockdown
- All those in education as they seek to reorganise schools for the safe return of children to classes
- All whose lives have been impacted by slavery in the past and today
- The Windrush generation
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the lock-down and those finding it difficult to move forward
- Other people and situations who are in your hearts today.
- The Church that we might offer a faithful witness to Christ through this time

Praise 706 For the healing of the nations

1. For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.

2. Lead your people into freedom,
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how, through care and
goodness,
fear will die and hope increase.

3. All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned:
pride of status, race or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.

4. You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness,
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Notices

Next Sunday 11.00am Worship (Service commences 11.15am)

If you would like to be added to the e-mail list for the link to Sunday's live worship gathering on zoom or join in on your landline please contact Susanna Tel 851345 or e-mail smbichard@aol.com. Next week this will include a short act of communion. If you wish to participate please have ready a piece of bread and some wine or grape juice.

Pastoral Matters

The Minister is available to deal with urgent pastoral matters Tel 851295

Care for the Community if you are aware of anyone who needs help of any kind please contact Ruth 851887

Tuesday 11.00am Session Coffee Morning

Wednesday 7.15pm Community Bible Experience Catch Up – for more details and link to meeting contact Alison Tel 851295

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