

COLLOQUIES with Pastor Brian

Reliability and Redemption

This week's scripture is the story of Abraham's casting Hagar and Ishmael out of his family and into the wilderness. Genesis 21:8-21 tells the story better but the recap is: Abraham had a child with Sarah's slave Hagar at Sarah's urging. But when Sarah conceives Isaac, she feels competition from Hagar and her child, so she demands Abraham send them away. While the story itself is brutal and harsh, I still find some hope in it. **First** of all, I wonder if this story highlights **how we as humans are not always reliable in our care for one another YET we can still trust God and God's promises. Secondly**, it seems that again, no matter what the situation, **God can redeem and make good out of what another person offered for harm or apathy.**

That this scriptural story comes on a Father's Day isn't lost on me. My father is a picture of reliability. Yet even in his wonderful support and care, he has missed on a few occasions that mattered a lot. And not all dads are reliable. We have unreliable fathers in our family tree as well.

Yet within the Christian family, we have the opportunity to take new people into our hearts as family members. It is no accident the early letters from the apostle Paul address the new churches as "Brothers". The early church recognized God was making of them a new thing; a new family. And that was because Jesus had promised in his leaving that the Holy Spirit would come and not leave them as orphans. **God had promised to be reliable and even breaking traditional family lines, gave the new followers a new family.**

The second key learning from the story of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael right now might be the opportunity for God to redeem. We have seen a sea change in Minnesota's twin cities right now because of a final action offered either in malice or worse, in unconcern for another human's life. The resulting destruction is not what God would desire and yet God would also not have Ishmael forgotten or abandoned, even if his name is Eric Garner, George Floyd or maybe a name closer to home. Maybe you feel like you've been intentionally offered harm or apathy?

We know God's redeeming power in taking harm and turning it around in the death and resurrection of Jesus as Christ. This is the central act of our faith. But for us to become the Christians we desire to be, we have to walk into the act of forgiveness, allowing God to use it. What I know of God's forgiveness is that God WILL make things good, but God can't let us into the redeeming power unless we allow it.

So what shall we name this week as our Sarah/Hagar moment? Where do we need to seek justice from Abraham or mercy from Ishmael? What would it look like for us to name where God is faithful even if we feel others have not been? And how can we name those who HAVE been like family to us even where the traditional blood lines don't exist?

God is reliable and God can redeem. I hope you can rely upon these promises for your week and month ahead. In Christ,

Pastor Brian

