

Today's sermon is rated PG and is meant for mature audiences. If I were delivering it in church and I could see who was watching, I may swap out some words, but I don't want to water down the impact of what I have to say. If I were delivering this sermon in church, it would be happening on Sunday, June 21<sup>st</sup> which is Father's Day. I realize that you may be watching it on Father's Day—or on another day. Let me wish you a very happy Father's Day.

I also want to acknowledge that for some, Father's Day is complicated or even difficult. There are fathers who don't see their young children or are estranged from their adult children. And there are children who don't know their fathers, or never had a relationship with their fathers, or whose fathers have died. And I want to acknowledge all of the men who wanted to be fathers but never were. You can see that there are many perspectives on this one day.

Perspective is so very important in all of life.

When I first read the Genesis passage that Pastor Dan just shared, I have to admit, I thought, O Lord, what do I do with that?!? It's not like Abraham is going to win a father of the year award! (And by the way, not for the last time. He has issues with Isaac down the road....)

Interestingly, Abraham was originally called Abram and he was renamed by God, signifying his new status. Abraham means Father of Nations. Okay, so Abraham, the Father of Nations, is the subject of the message this week. (Or is he?) Let's wonder together. Let's explore this passage and see where it takes us. Sometimes the greatest teaching moments happen when we present the questions without the answers.

In the story, we've got Abraham and his wife Sarah. We've got their son Isaac. We've got his playmate, Ishmael, who is also Abraham's son. And we have Ishmael's mother, Hagar, who is Sarah's servant.

I'm going to ask you a question now and I want you to respond with the first thing that comes into your head. When you heard the scripture, who did you relate to? Was it Abraham—the male in the story. Or Sarah, his wife and apparently the decision maker? Was it Hagar, the one who served and was discarded? What about God, did you relate to God who saw Abraham's distress and said, "don't worry, I've got this". Did you find yourself consider the feelings of Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn son who was cast away or Isaac, the "legitimate" heir?

If you named anyone by Hagar, good! This message is for you. Because I think that the story is really about her. She's the real subject of this story and it's a message of hope, not just for the oppressed and those of the non-dominant culture, but hers is a message that can bring about compassion, empathy, and action today...all due to seeing things from her perspective.

This is a story, plain and simple, of dominance over another. According to Hagar was "purchased in Egypt". Sarah and Abraham wanted children so Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham in a manner like something out of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Abraham used Hagar to get a son. She's probably the first surrogate mother in history, but she didn't have a say in the plan. She was Sarah's servant or as you

heard in this translation, Sarah's slave. Too many other women, also called slaves, right here in this country, and not that long ago, also had no say. And their children weren't treated as legitimate heirs. And many were sent away (sold). If you're uncomfortable right now, I understand. This isn't history we're used to hearing outside of one class in middle school. And, the way I got this history, all of that was far away and long ago and it has nothing to do with what goes on today. Boy, was I wrong to think that!

Just last weekend in York there was a demonstration for a better black history curriculum in the schools. I support that. We need education. I highly recommend the book *Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* by Debby Irving. That book gave me new perspective and now that I'm beginning to have that, I want to share it!

But something about Sarah's not wanting to share rings true even today. Sarah didn't want her child to have to share his father's estate with his father's other son, the firstborn. In those days, Jewish firstborns got twice as much of everything and it was considered their birthright. But instead of getting twice as much, he didn't even get half. He was even sent away. Not allowed to live where Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac lived. Sarah belongs, Hagar doesn't Sarah and Abraham are Hebrew and Hagar is Egyptian. (Do you see what's happening here? Did you notice who has the privilege? How about the discrimination?)

Now, if you identified with Abraham or Sarah a moment ago when I asked, I can understand that. We were set up for that. We enter the story at a point when there's a celebration for their son. They were the people in power--just like many of the people watching right now are in the dominant culture. What does that mean? You see yourself represented on TV and in print regularly. You see yourself in pop culture and in business and banking and commerce.

When I asked with whom you identified, if you thought Sarah or Abraham, you may feel that those were the 'right' choices because God seems to have sanctioned Sarah's plan. Remember, he talked to Abraham and said, 'Go ahead and send them away. I'll take care of the boy.' God heard Abraham's distress.

The boy's name is Ismael, which means "God hears". When they ran out of water and were in deep distress, God heard their distress and helped them by showing them that there was water nearby. He opened Hagar's eyes (or perhaps gave her a different perspective).

I know that God has a preferential option for the poor and I think that we're supposed to, also, as Christians. Why else would God come here in a non-dominant culture, in a poor family with no status if not, at least in part, to experience the world through their eyes? And why would Jesus help the outcasts, the lepers, the blind, the bleeding if we're not supposed to do the same? Not just "helping" but restoring them into community always through the healing he brought? They were no longer unclean. It's always about restored community.

Today, people of color need to be reconciled into community, not because of anything they've done, but because of things that were done long ago and systems that perpetuate the wrong. They are still exiles. I didn't even know about red lining. It still happens today. Families are not allowed into some neighborhoods. Consequently, more people of color live near waste management facilities and

factories. People of color face economic disparity even today. I read a story in the Globe on Wednesday that said that black families have 10% of the wealth white families have\*. 10%! There was a demonstration in York for better black history curriculum. There are things you may not even know about affecting us today. You may not even be aware of your own privilege.  
(\*<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/16/metro/america-what-took-you-so-long/>)

“Those who don’t know history are doomed to repeat it.” You’ve heard that said before. I always wondered why that was. I think in part it’s because history is written by the victors. The victors set the dominant culture. I want you just to think about the fact that there was a celebration last week on June 19<sup>th</sup>. It celebrates the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 and began on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865 when, a full 3 years later, Texas emancipated slaves. It’s been celebrated for over a hundred years. How much did you know about it? It’s only been on my radar for a couple of years. And it’s become significant this year because I’m learning about privilege. I’m learning about a perspective I didn’t even know I had.

Break down ‘history’ and you get his story. I want you to think about ‘whose’ story. Whose story are you hearing? Are you getting the whole story? You may think you understand the narrative, whatever the narrative is about whatever subject. Here’s your holy homework. I’m going to challenge you to look at the story from someone else’s vantage point. Once you do, notice if you see anything else differently...and notice if you see everything else differently. Blessed be and amen.