

Genesis 21:8-21  
Psalm 86:1-10, 16,17  
Romans 6:1b-11  
Matthew 10:24-39

Proper 7A  
St. Barnabas Bainbridge Island  
June 25, 2023  
The Rev. Karen Haig

### Claimed

When the Holy Spirit first started nudging me toward priesthood, with signs and words and tears and laughter, it was hard to take in, hard to make sense of and hard to figure out how to navigate. That very quiet voice inside of me grew slowly louder until I could no longer contain it, and I began to speak of it to my friends and family. As you might imagine, there were mixed responses – everything from “What? You, a priest? You don’t act like a priest!” to “How perfect, I am so very happy for you.”

Most of the people I was acquainted with at that time in my life didn’t go to church and certainly didn’t recognize God as having any claim on their lives. But that is one of the many gifts my call to ordained ministry offered – the recognition that God had full claim on my life. Now don’t misunderstand me- recognizing that God has a claim on my life, and allowing God to exercise that claim are two different things! I’m not suggesting that I then, or now, allow God to fully rule in my life. But more and more, I want to only want what God wants, and I long to live into that wanting.

As I began to realize what I was getting into - a couple of years of discernment, followed by leaving a job that I loved, moving away from friends and family, spending tens of thousands of dollars on grad school and really reorienting my life toward God, as I began to live into those things, some people in my life became scarce. There were those who thought the church was a joke, a self-serving hypocritical institution. There were those who were spiritual, but mostly when convenient and only when that spirituality demanded little or nothing of them. There were those who knew me well and understood what I was doing, and a few who knew me well and couldn’t make sense of it at all. When somebody we love makes a big decision to do something really different, it can cause us to look at what we’re doing – or not doing- and that isn’t always comfortable.

I tried my best to navigate all those relationships and the cracks in the relationships that were starting to show. But as the graduate school years went by, as I moved deeper and deeper into my studies and my relationship with God, some of the cracks turned into chasms. At one point, a very important friend in my life, someone who never gave a thought to God, asked me what could possibly be the point of becoming a pastor if it meant abandoning the people I loved?

It was a hard question.

It’s still hard.

*“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow*

*me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”<sup>1</sup>*

I know the truth of those words, and they are hard words. That important friend doesn’t speak to me anymore.

The divisions Jesus talked about were real. And even though he said, *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword,”<sup>2</sup>* I don’t think he meant he came to sever relationships. I think he meant that he knew relationships would come undone because of his presence and his claim on the lives of his followers. He was describing what was, not prescribing what he would do in the future. We need to remember that while Matthew’s gospel sounds like it was written when Jesus was walking the earth, it was actually written some fifty years after Jesus died, rose, and ascended. And that likely means the gospel writer had seen the divisions Jesus was talking about.

From the beginning, relationships have come undone because of God’s presence and the challenges presented by God’s claim on our lives. It happened in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate the fruit God told them not to eat. The knowledge of being exposed for who they really were caused Adam and Eve to hide from God, and from each other... their relationships were coming undone. It happened with Abram and Sarai and Hagar and Ishmael too. *“and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.”<sup>3</sup>*

Last week we heard the story of the long-awaited promise- that Abraham would be the father of many nations. We did finally hear the fulfillment of God’s promise, but not before hearing of Sarai taking matters into her own hands. Sarai wanted a child so much that she conceived the idea of a surrogate. She told Abram to impregnate her slave Hagar, so that she could *“obtain children by her.”<sup>4</sup>* And there begins another story of relationships coming undone. God had promised Sarai a child of her own, but after years of waiting, she’d given up on God and God’s promise. She’d forgotten God’s claim on her life and decided that she would take control, that she would lay claim to her own life. Or so she thought.

Things did not go as Sarai had planned. She hadn’t expected all the feelings she was feeling, and she certainly hadn’t expected that Hagar look upon her, the mistress of the house, with such contempt. Sarai was furious with her husband, with her slave, with the soon-to-be-born son that would never be her own. So Sarai said to Abram, *“May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with*

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:37-39

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 10:34

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 10:36

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 16:2b

*contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!”*<sup>5</sup> Sarai behaved so cruelly that Hagar, pregnant with Ishmael, ran away into the desert. Their relationships were coming undone.

Though Hagar’s contempt for Sarai was not the best of behaviors, Hagar did not try to control outcomes the way Sarai had. Perhaps it was because she was a slave and recognized that she had no control, but we can’t know that. God looked with favor upon Hagar and sent an angel to her in the desert. The angel asked *“Where did you come from and where are you going?”*<sup>6</sup> And Hagar replied that she had run away from her mistress. The angel admonished Hagar to return and submit to her mistress, which Hagar did. Why would an angel of the Lord tell a person to return to an abusive situation? That is a question I cannot answer, from a context I do not understand. Women were akin to property those many thousands of years ago and slave women even more so. What I do know is that even though Hagar was told to return to her subservient position and take whatever was dished out to her, she was also named in a tradition that rarely bothers to notice women, let alone tell us their names. And, having allowed God to lay claim on her life, Hagar survived, protected by the God of Abraham, the God who would make her the mother of another great nation.

God’s story is always so much bigger than our own individual stories. But when we’re caught up in the middle of our own stories, they are often all we can see. It isn’t so much that we need to choose God’s story over our story, we simply need to remember that our stories are a part of God’s great big, beautiful, redemptive story, even when we can’t see how that can be. We need to let go of the certainty surrounding our individual human stories, let our stories soften around the edges and become permeable so that God’s story can seep into our stories and our stories into God’s great story. We need to remember that trying to control outcomes is usually futile and that accepting the gifts that are right in front of us will more surely draw us more deeply into God and bring us closer to our heart’s desire.

Of course, all this has everything to do with recognizing God’s claim on our lives, recognizing our need to surrender, recognizing that maybe our stories can’t be what we’d hoped for, but that in truth, because they are a part of God’s story, they are so more than we could have imagined. Is that easy to believe or accept? Sometimes. Not always, especially not in the midst of loss or grief or any sort of deep suffering. But just because we sometimes can’t believe that God’s love redeems everything and that everything is somehow drawn into God’s story, doesn’t mean we’re living in a story without God. God is in every story.

All those divisions Jesus talked about make sense of the reality that sometimes we drop out of each other’s stories. But God remains in all the stories, whether they’re the stories of people who have walked out of our lives, the stories of people with whom we can’t reconcile, the stories of people who have gone on to eternal life, or our own stories, even when they’re not our best

---

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 16:5

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 16:8

stories. God is in all of it, lovingly laying claim to each one of us, seeing us and loving the particularities of each one of us, and all of our stories.

*"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. See, even the hairs on your head are counted..."<sup>7</sup>*

This is the God who loves us, who has made us a part of God's own story.

And if we allow it, this God who loves us with such abandon, promises abundantly far more than we could ask, or even imagine. Amen

.

---

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 10:29-30