

Sunday 25th June 2023

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Readings Genesis 21:8-21 ([Living Bible](#))

Matthew 10:24-39

Story The love-me bird ([Listen here](#))

Reflection

The reading from genesis is not a comfortable reading. We witness Sarah's jealousy and her need to get rid of the threat to her own son, Isaac. Jealousy can lead us to do hurtful things and it hurts us. We are all aware of the power of social media to encourage introspection and comparison and the result is rarely positive. Christian contentment is about the peace with comes from being comfortable in your own skin and accepting self. We rejoice in blessings and we face challenges in the knowledge that we are one with God and never alone. We have no need to be jealous but it is a temptation of our humanity as we currently know it.

Abraham is caught in the middle, caught between the Sarah and Hagar and caught in his love for both Isaac and Ishmael. There are many parents in the world today in a similar position, separation followed by new families brings tension but love is always the key. As parents our love grows as our family grows, we have the capacity to love more and more because we are made in the image of the God of eternal love, but family circumstances can make it difficult to show that love. For Abraham there is the reassurance that God loves both his sons and both will be honoured but for now Abraham puts Sarah first and we read of the effect this has on Hagar. She is distressed, distraught and angry but in the midst of this she experiences and encounter with God that changed her life. Ishmael did not die in the wilderness because Hagar saved him through the insight of the Spirit, through a connection and an openness and trust that revealed a solution. We are never alone and we can be the door to that connection for others through sharing our experience of God in the challenging times of our lives.

In our reading from Matthew we have another difficult and sometimes confusing reading. We ask ourselves what are the key points, and how might we hear and interpret them. There are as many opinions about this passage as there are commentaries, each putting their own spin on the reading often driven by the commentators own strand of theology and belief, and I am no different as I stand hear and share with you.

The passage comes in two sections, verses 24 – 31 and 32 – 39 and each section is challenging and holds different key points.

24- 31 – do not be afraid, all secrets will be revealed, do not fear worldly enemies but fear that which threatens your belief in God, God loves all creation, every sparrow is known and loved, every hair on your head is counted so recognise his overwhelming love for you.

32 -39 – reminds us of our human capacity for denial and acceptance, Jesus message will not always bring peace it can bring disruption. V35 & 36 are a quotation from Micah a reminder that to advance or evolve usually divides opinion and there are those who will cling to the past. Following Jesus is not easy but it does lead us closer to contentment.

Do not be afraid is the most used commandment in Scripture and that fact demonstrates our how easy we find it to live in fear. However, when we trust in God's eternal presence and our place within God then we can let go of many of the fears that drive our lives. Matthew goes on to say that all secrets will be revealed and I wonder if that phrase brings with it fear, the opposite of Matthew's intention. We all have secrets and if we are honest we don't want them aired for all to see. We do need to address our secrets especially if they are holding us back in our relationship with each other and with God. However, that is not what this passage is talking about. The world is full of contrasts – revealed/concealed, known/unknown, light/dark but the time will come when all is revealed, all is known and the light eliminates darkness. Some say this is a time beyond this world but others say it is the coming of the Kingdom to this world, Jesus said the Kingdom

is already coming, it is a work in progress. If we are afraid of secrets, afraid of the unknown then the darkness still has the power to affect us. Jesus says do not be afraid.

This world is troubled and terrible things happen. How do we explain that? Some people chose to set up an alter ego to God and blame this character but for me if God is everywhere, ever present and in everything then God is in the good and thee bad. God is and for me there is no alter ego, only our failure to be fully loving. We are too much love me and not enough love you. Following the way of Jesus means accepting this, working with this and doing everything we can to be light rather than dark by growing into our relationship with God and growing into our humanity and embracing LOVE.

Love has no secrets. This is not about not keeping a surprise party secret, it does mean being honest with ourselves and each other, and being honest with God. The presence of trouble and unrest is not a sign of God's absence from the world but a sign of our failure to fully embrace love. We cannot control others but we can encourage them to explore a different way, and by our example we can show the power of love to make a difference.

To embrace love is to set out on a journey to a new future, when we deny this we are settling for the present reality. Evolution brings change and change is not always welcome and so there will be divisions that is what Jesus is saying when he quotes Micah but it does not have to be that way. We have a choice, to love or not to love, to be one in God or to reject God and plough or own furrow, a furrow in which God is present but we choose to ignore God's presence.

Every one of is living a story, our story and stories are filled with contrasts. In every story about family there are challenges, the sort of challenge we read about in Genesis, because as family we are more than self and we have to learn to live with others but that is the point.

Self love is not really love. Only when we love others, selflessly, do we really experience love ourselves. Do not be afraid, instead love as God loves, unconditionally and generously, putting the needs of others first.