

Bible Study 17th June 2020

Preparation

In our Bible Study this week we will be reading the following lectionary readings set for Sunday (21st June):

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

There's a short YouTube introduction at https://youtu.be/z18vk604_t0

When exploring this week's readings you may wish to follow the pattern below:

Pray a simple prayer first. Perhaps start with a cry to God and then a prayer of commitment

Then read one of the readings

PAUSE and reflect on that reading

- Did you understand anything new?
- Did something shift in your understanding?
- What do you ask of God?
- What do you wish to commit to God

If anything particular has struck you, try returning to it and reflecting again on that part of the reading. You might also want to make some notes.

After your reflection, you can move on to another reading. (You don't have to look at them all.)

When you have finished your reflections, pray the final prayer:

Final Prayer:

Jesus we cry to you for help but we also commit ourselves to be your followers. Give us comfort in our need and courage in our commitment. **Amen.**

A few reflections

I found these readings challenging.

There are so many things which seem wrong about this bit of the Genesis story. Sarah comes over as harsh and jealous: a mother who doesn't like her child playing with his half-brother. Why is God blessing her and not the slave, Hagar? But, perhaps that is not entirely fair on Sarah. In the past Sarah has suffered from Hagar's attitudes and her meanness. Now Sarah has found hope in Isaac, perhaps she is afraid that somehow Hagar will take that hope from her. Maybe Sarah really distrusts Hagar and feels her son is threatened.

Nevertheless the situation is harsh for Hagar. Abraham doesn't want to send out his son, Ishmael, into the wilderness with his mother, that they might die, but Sarah is insisting that she has to go. Abraham does have reassurance from God that the child will be alright, but those times are hard times and people are living in dangerous conditions and for Hagar, this is a terrible thing. Sent out at dawn, with a skin of water and a bit of bread and her son on her shoulder, Hagar is burdened and alone. Unable to cope, she places the child a long way away, presumably so she can't hear his crying, and she weeps and cries out to God. God replies to her saying that the voice of the boy has been heard and he will be alright and that there will be a future for him. I don't know why the angel draws Hagar's attention to the boy voice rather than her own prayers, but, whatever the reason, that message is enough for Hagar to look again and see water... and water means life.

I am reminded that God gives life freely. That links with Jesus saying that our lives are precious – even the hairs on our head are numbered. It's interesting that he says that in the Matthew reading as a comforting thought in the middle of a passage that seems pretty difficult and causes me discomfort. In the Matthew reading this bit about God's care for us comes in the context of the disciples being sent out like sheep amongst wolves. So Jesus is offering reassurance to the disciples as they go on their first mission to share good news.

The Romans and Matthew readings are quite intense – they talk of death and denial, they talk about taking up the cross and crucifixion with Christ. This is not the kind of language that I use much. Is that because I am afraid of death, or maybe worried about the quality of my acknowledgement of Jesus? Am I stuck in sin and death? These two readings, to me, are not about what *I* claim to be the case but what actually is the case. I can proclaim that my sins are forgiven, but it's not my voice that counts – it is the voice of God. It is God who speaks and provides the water of life.

The Matthew reading (after the lectionary reading is over) goes on to say, "whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward." That's reassuring. I might have done that at some point in my life!