

Announcements:

- today is the 50th anniversary of Stonewall; it happened in New York in 1969 and became a galvanizing and symbolic event in the struggle for LGBTQ2plus rights. Police raided a bar, and for the first time, the patrons actively resisted. The resulting confrontation lasted 5 days and inspired a generation of activists.

- today is also the feast day of St Irenaeus; the 2nd Century bishop of Lyons, who famously said “the glory of God is the human being, fully alive”

Those two things seem to go together well, don't you think? And to think that 50 years later is it still not universally accepted that people – God's precious children – from the LGBTQ2plus community have a right to be fully alive; fully who they are.

Sermon – Hagar and Pride Week

This story deserves to be told.

This morning, Hagar is stepping into her place in the sun

She was sent into the sun.....into the scorching heat of the desert.... into what was meant to be a punishing, life denying situation....

where the sun was meant to drain and dry up her life

and it did not

but rather enabled her to see and be seen; to hear the first annunciation ever in scripture,

beneath a sun that shone on her and enabled her to be seen

and heard

and to receive a promise so revolutionary it still is not fully grasped today.

She deserves her place in the sun.

And this time of year ...just past the solstice....when the sun is at its strength and we are at our most open to its blessing....

perhaps this is the very time for her story to be told.

Hagar deserves to be remembered

She deserves this first, because she is “the other.”

Her very name means the other. The alien. The foreigner.

And these days too, all the Hagars and their stories demand to be heard. To be heard.

To be heard for her own self,

and for the sake of her child,

and

for all those who have been called and still are called....the other. The alien, the foreigner – not like us

and driven into whatever wilderness presents itself for the convenience of our status quo.

Hagar deserves to be remembered.

She has been othered in so many ways.

You heard her story just now. I wonder if you’ve heard it before. I hope you have.

Her story is in our scriptures, but even in churches she has been othered, ignored, sent out into the wilderness of “stories we ignore”

by those who decided what readings we’d have every week

because it’s only recently that even part of her story has been included at all.

Her story has not been told.

And now she is demanding to be heard

and seen

And it’s an honour to hold up her story today.

As you can imagine I could go on for quite some time

holding this story up like the jewel it is, with the light shining through it,

and depending on which way you hold it

shining differently with a different colour..

almost like a rainbow.

For our purposes today though I will try to control myself.....I want to focus on just three things.

First: Until now, if you're reading the whole thing in Genesis....until now, the story has been all about Sarah and Abraham.

The narrator has been following their story for quite a few chapters and we've been getting comfortable with them.

They are not heroes – they are all too human – but theirs is the story that we've been following and we've learned to cheer for them as they follow the leading of a voice that calls them to leave familiar, safe lives, and become their true selves by following that call into an unknown, and possibly dangerous future.

They've been the main characters. The narrator has focused on them, you know? We've identified with them, wondered what would happen to them next....it's been Sarah and Abraham against the world, if you like. And we identify with them. Sarah and Abraham in the wilderness on a journey that's us....right? I've preached that sermon a hundred times.

And now

Sarah and Abraham are not such sympathetic characters. They have become – is this possible – the oppressors? It throws us off.

This is genius, sophisticated, powerful writing on the part of these ancient writers. All of a sudden, the main characters – with whom we've identified and seen as the ones having the struggle.....

have become guilty of abusive and ugly behaviour. And we're thrown off.... as we should be.

Is it possible that the main characters of our own lives that is to say we ourselves

is it possible that we are being asked to see ourselves as guilty, as the oppressor?

And how wonderfully appropriate that this reading should come to us now when we've just been focusing as never before on black lives when we've just passed the 5th anniversary of the TRC and its calls to action

and as we celebrate Pride month.

In the context of this story Hagar is as powerless as you can get.

She's a child

She's a female child

She's an enslaved female child

She's an Egyptian enslaved female child.

And, remember, the narrative of most of the Hebrew scriptures has the Egyptians as the oppressors! Here she is the oppressed. What social/theological vertigo is this???

In that culture and at that time she is completely powerless

except for one thing: her fertility, but she has no choice about how or if to conceive – it's at the whim and pleasure of her master and mistress.

And the one thing that gives her a measure of power – that she can bear children – is the very thing that gets her kicked out into the desert.

And by this layered, sophisticated, story teller's tale, we are invited – coaxed even – into entertaining the possibility that just as Sarah and Abraham are not only the brave journeying underdogs but now are also powerful, selfish and casually cruel.

Just as they are – the story asks.....are you? Are you? Who have you consigned to the desert?

Hagar deserves to have her story told for herself and for every young person who has been turned out of her home. For every individual or group who has been denied the basics of life by those with power to make it otherwise.

Sarah's bitter words "the son of this slave woman shall not inherit with my son" - that's a narrative of scarcity.

Sarah thinks there won't be enough.

Now to be fair to her, she's a woman too. And her own life and wellbeing depend on the menand when Abraham dies (he's already 100 soo.....) it will matter very much to her that her son will inherit. Perhaps her life depends on it. It's complicated I know it is....it always is....

but imagine living your life terrified that there won't be enough. Enough money, or food. Many people live that way daily, for years.

But now imagine not having the spiritual or poetic capacity to believe that there is enough love enough place in the sun for people whose...just for example....whose sexuality is not your own. Imagine the poverty of that – not being able to conceive of a world where there's enough inheritance of space, enough grace, enough freedom to live free – for people who are not like you!

Sarah's schema of scarcity is sad and feeble and frankly, it's beneath her. I hope she lived long enough to regret it and repent.

Finally – what is the most important of all. Hagar's story deserves to be told because even though, in the end, the whole book is the book about Sarah and Abraham, the attention of the narrator and the attention of God follows Hagar.

Twice she is driven from the relative safety of the settlement where she is a slave. Twice the narrator follows Hagar and leaves the rest behind. Twice the voice of God, the compassion and the promise are with Hagar.

The narrator has no interest in what is happening back in the camp. We left the coming of age party for Isaac mid celebration and so did God and here we are in the desert.

This is huge. This is HUGE. The basic tenet of all liberation theologies.

The focus, the attention, the care of the Holy One are with those who are marginalized. With those who are suffering. With those whose humanity has been denied. With those whose children cry for water. With those mothers who can't bear it.

GOD IS HERE, WITH HAGAR.

This is a basic biblical principle. Jesus tells the story of the shepherd who leaves the 99 and goes after the one who is lost. And endless variations on the theme.

God is with those who are hurting.

And maybe in the days when this was first told and then written maybe there were those who said

“Sarah and Abraham matter too – why is the angel with Hagar? All lives matter. Maybe they said the Hebrew equivalent of “Why do they need a parade? I don't demand a parade for heterosexual people”

*The Bible is telling us what's what.
and why.*

and counting on us to have enough grace, and breadth of soul, to understand.

*The old preaching teachers used to say
give them
three points and a poem.*

*I have no poem – only the poetry of these beautiful texts
my three points, however, have been these:*

Hagar needs to be told and remembered

1) For the sake of all those who have been othered

*2) For the way the story turns on its head our ideas about who is the focus of God's love,
for the way it asks “ It is possible....do you think....is it possible that you have become
the oppressors, you - who always identify with the good guys?*

And Hagar needs to be remembered

*3) for the way her story shines like the sun with the fundamental biblical truth that God
is on the side of the oppressed.*

*All lives matter? Can't they just get over it? Why do they need a parade – I don't get
one????*

*All the chatter, all the voices from the camp where the party is being given for
Isaac.....these are the lyrics to some of their songs...*

*And this story stands here, silent, strong and stubborn
just simply, consistently offering the Biblical principle one more time*

*God – who created the world and all its creatures, of every kind...God who created
diversity and delights in it – God is with those who suffer; who have been marginalized,
who have been othered by those who imagine that they have special inheritance and the
monopoly on the divine.*

*Today we stand with pride
we stand with Hagar
and we stand with those who are organizing this year's Pride events
and we stand before a word of life
humbly and with delight
at the wondrous ways of our creator
who created us – all of us – and said
it's good. it's very good.*

Commissioning and Benediction (not mine; taken from Richard Rohr's daily meditations)

It is time to awaken to self, society, and the cosmos, for none of us has the luxury of sleepwalking through this moment in history. In the last sermon that he preached before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King Jr. urged us to “remain awake through a great revolution.”

Up above our heads, there are worlds unknown and a canopy of grace, light, air, and water that supports our survival.

the wonder that is available with each breath.

Today, God's gift of scientific information teaches us about everything: about the gloriously diverse universe in which we are blessed to exist; Diverse ethnically, racially, sexually...
glorious diversity of every kind.
Of every kind.

And, thanks be to God, the foundations for hierarchy, dominance, and rationality are crumbling, while proponents of gender, class, [racial,] and sexual equity have found their public voices. . . .

We are not hamsters on a wheel, waiting to fall into the cedar shavings at the bottom of the cage. We are seekers of light and life, bearers of shadows and burdens. We are struggling to journey together toward moral fulfillment.

We are learning to embrace the unfathomable darkness where God dwells with enthusiasm that equals our love of light.

We are not just citizens of one nation or another, but of the human and cosmic community.

Awareness is the moment when we rise with eyes crusted from self-induced dreams of control, domination, victimization, and self-hatred to catch a glimpse of the divine in the face of “the other.”

Let's rise and be on our way