

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individual or family
Sunday 21st June 2020 at 10:30 am.

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Call to worship

Incline your ear, O Lord as we ask that you will respond to our prayers; we trust in your abundant mercy and ask that you will come to us.

O Lord, make your presence known to us; draw near to us; redeem us, set us free; for we seek to be your faithful disciples. Come Lord and hear our cry.

Hymn (R&S 629)

Make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring your love,
Where there is injury your pardon, Lord and where there is doubt, true faith in you
O Master grant that I may never seek, so much to be consoled, as to console
To be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul.

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Thanksgiving

Loving God, Father and Mother of us all we give you thanks and praise for this new day.

We think to ourselves how your heart must break at the suffering you see.
The changes we have made to your world, the damage to the environment around us and the broken relationships we have

Thank you for showing us that you care. Thank you for being alongside us in our need.
Thank you for your love
Thank you for all that you are, we pray that you will mould us and re-make us and enable us to be the disciples you called us to be.

We fear the unknown path, the conflict and division. We fear the sacrifices we will be asked to make. Forgive when our faith seems weak and we are uncertain about the way you want us to go. Forgive us when we fail to speak out.

Grant us forgiveness; grant us perseverance; grant us vision; that we may serve you as you desire and play our part in establishing your kingdom.
All these prayers we bring together in the saying...

The Lord's Prayer



Readings

Genesis 21: 8 -21

God blesses and protects Hagar too!

Psalms 86: 1-10

Someone in need finds help from God

Matthew 10: 24 - 39

Strength for difficult times...

Romans 6: 1 -11

Dying to sin, living for Christ...

Reflection

Today I would like to explore possible links between the lectionary readings for this Sunday and *Windrush Day*, which is being celebrated on 22nd June. In seeking to be faithful to both Biblical text and our current context, I will link the lectionary texts with *Windrush Day*, paying particular attention to identity in relation to the story of dispute between Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 21:8-21.

Observance of *Windrush Day* was introduced in the UK in 2018. It was on 22nd June, 1948 that several hundred people arrived from the Caribbean on board the *HMS Empire Windrush* to start a new life in Britain. Caribbean people who had served in the British armed forces were encouraged and invited to come to Britain to work. More people followed. It is estimated that around 500,000 people living in the UK are part of the *Windrush generation*.

Windrush Day marks these arrivals and seeks to honour the diverse contributions the Caribbean community has made to British society. Like many migrant stories, those who arrived were full of hope; they had served and fought for their country and they were coming to the Mother land. The plan was they would probably just stay for about five years, but five turned into ten and ten became 50. Over time, many faced racism and discrimination.

Children were picked on at school and jobs were difficult to obtain. Hence *Windrush Day* can be broadened to include reflection on migrant journeys in general and what it means to be a hospitable community. A hostile environment was created and this is where the Windrush generation found themselves.

So let us turn to Sarah and Hagar. While it suited Sarah she was willing to go against God's will and not wait for God to fulfil his promise for her to have a son. So she suggested that Abraham took their maid servant to act as a surrogate mother. Hagar gave birth to a son, whom she called Ishmael. As Hagar's son grew Sarah became more resentful. When she eventually had her own son, whom she called Isaac, she created a 'hostile environment' and Hagar was sent out into the wilderness with her son.

This reading provides some dignity to Hagar, and to all those who experience injustice. She meets hopelessness with hope and received her promise from God in her time of need and destitution. As we are told that God heard the cries of the child, while they were struggling to find water. Hagar, from her position of a maid servant, played a vital role in God's redemptive plan as God promised to make a great nation of him.

While in our liturgical calendar of ordinary time when we celebrate various events, *Windrush Day* is not a festival, to mark this event we can nevertheless invite learning, growth and changes of behaviour and attitudes to educate communities about the experiences of the Windrush generation and women like Hagar who are marginalised.

As they seek to make their way, they can expect to find God with them, attentive to all who cry for justice. In our current context this text allows us to have sensitive conversations with people today who experience marginalisation, including through gender and ethnicity. In order to undertake such conversations, we can explore and reflect on further accounts in history, and the present day, in which people (especially women) are marginalised.

Many of you would have seen the film *Caught in Limbo*, which for this particular family had a happy ending. We saw someone who was settled, being denied legal rights, illegally detained and threatened with deportation. However, he did get his 'right to remain' after a long legal battle. The timing of this is poignant, as there was a similar story of a man who came to England when he was ten years old with his mother and sister. He was educated and worked for 50 years. In the meantime his mother had gone back to Jamaica, and her health was deteriorating.

He managed to get back to Jamaica to see his mother. Sadly she died while he was there and there were problems getting her body back to England for burial. However, her son was not allowed back into England and he missed his mother's funeral.

The family did all they could to record, take photos and note all the people who attended through a book of condolence, but nothing can replace missing your mother's funeral. It was heart breaking. This was an unjust system that caused unnecessary suffering for many people.

Marginalisation refers to the act of perceiving or assuming that a particular individual or a group of individuals do not have certain characteristics, qualities or traits that would make them equal to other people in the society.

A person who does not have certain traits that the society considers desirable may be marginalised from receiving certain benefits in the society or may be excluded from being involved in certain social activities within the society, e.g. employment or access to quality education. Individuals who are marginalized in the society often live desperate lives as a result of the discriminations and maltreatments that they experience. We need to find ways of speaking up and speaking out against marginalisation, which leads to prejudice and hate.

God saw in Hagar, many qualities, faith, hope, wisdom and courage. Throughout her difficulties, God remained with her. And so it is for us today, as we struggle with the injustices which continue in our world and the difficulties we face with lockdown, we have the promise of a God who is with us, a God of salvation, a God of love, justice and peace.

Song

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found was blind but now I see

'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear and Grace my fears relieved
How precious did that Grace appear the hour I first believed

My chains are gone, I've been set free - My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy rains - Unending love, Amazing Grace

The Lord has promised good to me; His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures

Prayers of Intercession

Father Creator, who has given us this world as our home, we pray for all those whose special responsibility is to care. May each of us play our part in using its resources wisely, never overusing or wasting the gift. May we all appreciate its richness and diversity, offering grateful praise to you for your creation and love of all you have made.

Mighty Lord, as the world experiences Corona virus and humanity finds life is as never before, help it to use the time to reflect, to rethink and to make a new reality so that when the pandemic passes, it makes a new and better place for all created beings.

Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour, give your church new vitality and strength and renew each member's courage so that the church may spread the Good News with great energy and with increased assurance that, despite all opposition, you are with them...that there is nothing too small, too insignificant to be within your loving care. Guide the church to take new opportunities to serve in your name.

As many people will be without jobs and others find it difficult to manage with less money, inspire the church to bring them new hope and happiness in finding faith and purpose while helping in practical ways too. May your name be spoken very often in the streets and homes of Sheffield. Be with our Sheffield leaders and members as your Holy Spirit guides the church to call a new member of the ministry team

Holy Spirit bring God's loving presence to the people for whom we are concerned, those known to us who are facing illness or loss. Share in the joy of those who rejoice. We pray, especially, for separated and divided families. This morning we remember the Windrush families. Lord God, though it is easier to pray for those we know may our prayerful concern reach out to men and women in refugee camps or being trafficked, the marginalised, those desperate for a new life who are in danger or to anyone who faces great difficulty.

Bring your peace, Lord, to all caught up in conflict whether within a family or between nations. As we offer our prayers, for the peace makers who have come forward in the Black Lives Matter protests. We remember all the people and the police who have had difficult encounters, we pray that both sides will come to understand that we are all created equal in God's image.

Lord Jesus, in the midst of a storm, you said, 'Peace be still.' Bid our anxious fears subside. Sustain your church in faith, hope and love, bring our nation through this turmoil, challenge and distress. Grant wisdom to those who lead. And healing and hope to those who are ill.

Hymn R&S 620

For the healing of the nations,
Lord we pray with one accord,
For a just and equal sharing
Of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action,
Help us to rise up and pledge our word.

Lead us, Father into freedom;
From despair your world release,
That redeemed from war and hatred
All may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
Fear will die and hope increase

Blessing

Father, unite all people You have created in Your image
Jesus, bring justice to all people for whom You died
Holy Spirit lead us to think, work and speak for justice

So may the blessing of Father, Son and Spirit
Be in our world
Through Your blessed people