

ALL MY CHILDREN
(Gen. 17: 1-8; 25: 1-6)

The season of Lent can help to remind us—even in the face of all of our human-made inequality—just how “equal” we really are, at least in one sense.

From the very beginning of the season, on Ash Wednesday, when we all walk around with that ash smudge on our foreheads, after it was smeared there while we all heard the same words trying to make themselves plain to us. Words that said: *“Hey YOU! Whoever you REALLY are, and whoever you THINK that you are: never forget that a big part of WHAT you are is DUST, and to DUST you shall return—guaranteed! And that—you little control freak you—is NOT IN YOUR HANDS!”*

That kind of equality doesn’t depend on the color of your skin, the size of your bank account, the neighborhood you lived in, or whether you earned a GED, a PhD, or no “D”!

That's one reason it was always so ridiculous to me that the history of our white supremacist country includes segregated graveyards—people of African or Native descent not being allowed to be buried in the same cemeteries and burial grounds as people of European descent. I don't think that while our physical bodies are turning into dust, that white people are turning into *white* dust and black people are turning into *black* dust; so there should be no fear of some kind of “cross-contamination” of remains. I think when we die, we all become equal-opportunity dust . . .

How unfortunate it is that most people in this life have to wait until death and dust to be part of something that is *even in the ballpark* of being *equal opportunity* for them!

For example, half of the population—which are female—do not have equal opportunity no matter what color or ethnicity or ability level they

are, for the simple, misogynistic, detrimental, and unsustainable reason that they are *female*.

And then there are large percentages of the *other* half of the population that are standardized by discrimination of some sort or the other: skin color, ability, race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, weight, language, age . . . When 8 people in the world have more wealth at their disposal than the bottom 3 billion people in the world *combined*—like our present income inequality situation is today—then it is fair to say that most people in the world do not get to sit in the ball park of equality and equal opportunity in their lifetime.

II.

While doing my research for this sermon, I ran across some interesting scriptural history concerning Abraham, whom two of our Bible readings are about today. It's some scriptural history that lends itself to a discussion about *equality and equal opportunity*.

We know Abraham: that scriptural hero who is considered to be the “father of the faith;” a faith that extends from Judaism to Christianity to Islam.

Abraham: that one who was chosen by God—along with Sarah—to be in a *covenant* relationship; a relationship built on righteousness and trust and faith.

Abraham: that one whose name was changed by God from Abram (exalted ancestor) to Abraham (ancestor of a multitude);

Abraham: that one who was told by God that he would be exceedingly fruitful, and nations would come from his offspring, and that the covenant would be established with his offspring throughout their generations;

Abraham: that one who was so struck with awe and gratitude to God that he could father a child at the ripe old age of 100 . . .

Well, it must’ve gotten good to him, because we learn from scripture that after he outlived Sarah and buried her, he married a woman

named Keturah, and had six more sons with her! So, all told, Abraham had 8 children—all boys—and had them all after he was 86 years old!

They were *all his children*.

But the scriptures say that *“Abraham gave all he had to Isaac.”*

Even though Isaac wasn’t even his first-born—Ishmael was.

Even though Ishmael’s mother, Hagar, was the rape victim in a plot hatched by both Abraham AND Sarah, and was not only never compensated, but was labeled a “concubine.”

Even though Keturah was called Abraham’s “wife” in Gen. 25:1; but by 25:6 she too is called a “concubine.”

It’s clear that in this Abraham/Isaac/Jacob version of the story, not one of Abraham’s children gets Abraham’s blessing like Isaac does. The other sons are given gifts by Abraham, since they are not legally “entitled” to an inheritance, and sent away by Abraham to the “east country.”

III.

Well, I know traditions are what they are, when they are; and that according to the traditions of that time, Abraham was not required to share his inheritance with all his sons.

But Abraham was told by the God of abundance that “he would be exceedingly fruitful,” and would be “the ancestor of a multitude of nations.” He was told that a covenant would be established, not only with Abraham, but with “his offspring after him throughout their generations.”

It seems to me, that the one we know as the “father of faith” decided that only ONE of his sons was going to be in that number. In the matter of Abraham’s children, all of his children were not created equal in Abraham’s sight. Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac, and only gifts to his other 7 sons. Lavishing relative abundance upon Isaac, and relative scarcity upon the others.

Though all were his children . . .

Imagine the imbalance that caused among the half-brothers. Imagine the possible feelings of jealousy and envy; the possible rift in communication between them; the unevenness of the flow of inherited resources trickling through the family; the non-existence of passed-down wealth that passed some parts of the family right by.

I find myself wondering if Keturah and Hagar's sons helped to feed and water the flocks that Abraham gave to Isaac; or if they helped to tend the land that ended up on Isaac's side of the ledger; or if they helped to care for some of the family heirlooms that ended up in Isaac and Rebekah's house.

You see, all of them were Abraham's children; but they were not considered to be equal, so all of them were not heirs—even tho' they were family.

Our human family seems to take after some of the dysfunction of the family of Abraham.

We are all God's children.

But we don't treat one another like we are members of the same family. We create imbalances and unevenness among ourselves, based on whatever we arbitrarily decide should be the order of the day, or the point of departure among us.

We foment rifts and jealousies that are meant to keep us at each other's throats. We coopt fairness and justice. We steal each other's wages. We exploit and enslave each other, conquer and classify each other, look down upon each other, and leave each other out, in favor of "my own kind;"

Yet, we are all God's children; but some of us get shafted by some others.

We only need look at the history of humankind's treatment of humankind to see what has always been right before us.

IV.

But today we are offered a new opportunity through the ministry, challenge and love of Jesus.

Today we are called by Jesus to set our minds on *divine* things rather than *human* things.

We are called this very day, to believe the promises of God.

We are called to realize the blessings that God is already pouring out because we are already God's children.

We are called by Jesus to realize *God's view of abundance* instead of *our view of scarcity*.

We are called by Jesus this very day, to forget about ourselves, and to live for others.

We are called by Jesus to take up a cross—not something that manifests itself as a temporary pain in the behind, but something that manifests itself as liberation for somebody;

as freedom for somebody;

as release for somebody;

as recognition for somebody;

as acknowledgement of somebody . . .

In his-tory and in her-story there are always names and people and

situations that some of us wish we could just forget—like Michael

Brown, Sandra Bland, Matthew Shepard, transgenders, the Rohingya

Muslims, victims of Columbine, Sandy Hook, Parkland—

but by speaking their names, and speaking *in* their names, we may be

able to bring a measure of justice, fairness, recognition, and equality

where none was before. That's the kind of cross Jesus was talking

about!

So, for ALL the children of Abraham: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian,

Ishbak, Shuah, Ishmael and Isaac,

And for all the rest of God's children everywhere,

May you not give up

Not give out

Not give in;

Because God knows who we are,

And what we are going through,

And the needs that we need to go through it,

Or to stand up for it.

Because we are ALL God's children!

Amen.

©by stephen g. marsh