

21/06 2nd Sunday after Trinity Genesis 21: 8–21 Matthew 10: 24–39

'You are of more value than a million canaries'

I find it intriguing how different versions of the Bible unwrap the meaning of a passage, '*many sparrows*' in the *NRSV* becomes '*a million canaries*' in *The Message*. I laughed out loud when I heard that, and then I gulped as it's the number and change of bird which reinforces the message of our worth and value to Jesus - it's overwhelming. The Message also has Jesus say, '*This is a large work I've called you into, but don't be overwhelmed by it, it's best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice.*' More on this later....

On the face of it, today's readings are as challenging to the head as they are to the heart. The story of Abraham and Sarah sounds cruel. Hagar, the slave girl, is used when Sarah sees no other way of having a child.

She'd tried to force God's hand. But, when God kept the promise and Sarah had Isaac, jealousy, fear and status awoke, like monsters, from the depths of her heart. What was Abraham to do? Each way he turned he saw dilemma and chaos so, he had a conversation with God, as with a friend, and was reassured by the words for Hagar's son, '*I will make a nation of him also...*'

Knowing the hearts of women and men God also said, 'Do what your wife tells you'. Abraham did, because he knew the outcome. God rescued Hagar and her baby with living water, the original cool cup. God looked out for both children and for the slave girl so, maybe this is a story about young children and slavery as much as it's about Abraham and Sarah. This small scene from the Genesis epic reminds us there is nothing adults can do that is beyond reclamation because Abraham's God, our God, is the God who knows the depths of the human heart and extravagantly loves it, in spite of the monsters living within. Dilemmas can be resolved, chaos redeemed.

Matthew's Chapter 10 continues this theme with Jesus calling ordinary working people, naming and sending them out with a long list of instructions ringing in their ears. The list sounds confusing but I suspect it summarises the types of people and kinds of events the disciples might have met on their travels to share Good News after Resurrection. Maybe Jesus explained, using these 12 different images, so each disciple could understand how to prepare for their particular task ahead.

He encouraged them not to be afraid, 'You are of more value than a million canaries'. On the other hand, they needed to be very clear about

the choice they were offering. The choice had consequences. Cosiness, the old 'peace' would have to be exchanged for a new 'Peace', like a sword, seeking justice and reconciliation; the Old ways must be exchanged for the New Way, Jesus' Way.

Jesus' Way is written in Matthew 10 as a kind of training plan. Jesus trains the hearts of all apprentices to work alongside the monsters lurking within, not ignoring them which also teaches us to work alongside the monsters in others, people far away we don't even know about or those nearer to home we find hard to like, let alone love. Understanding this is Jesus' Way.

I love to watch someone who is master of their art whether it's repairing something old, playing an instrument, singing, painting, writing, cooking or preaching. These make my heart sing. Jesus was Master of the art of loving people to their core and deeper still. He talked, conversed, invited, listened, healed, offered wholeness, ate and drank with those on society's fringes; he challenged those who thought they knew it all, he prayed, he waited, doing nothing without first hearing from his Father. True apprenticeship begins by choosing one you are already good at, then praying and waiting. One day you, who are worth a million canaries, will become someone else's answer to prayer.

Knowing we are extravagantly loved, despite the shape and depths of our hearts, we become bold enough to offer that cup of cold water to someone, to pray for them and then wait. Children, young and older people, learn to do this by watching and listening to the Master and intentionally becoming a true apprentice...

Lord God, keep us aware of the depths of our hearts and how you offer to shape them so we, like Jesus, can talk about you, converse with others, invite, listen, heal, offer wholeness, eat and drink with people on the fringes, challenge, pray, wait and to do nothing without first knowing Your Way to Peace, through Your Holy Spirit and in Jesus' name. Amen. Happy Father's Day.