



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

June 21, 2026; Proper 7A: Genesis 21:8-21; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

Here at St. Luke's, we have had a long series of celebrations. A month ago was Mother's Day and first communion. This was followed by a summer kickoff party, Pride, an Annual Meeting and several very special weddings. Then came the Knicks, the World Cup and Shinnecock. Now it's Father's Day and a baptism. Unfortunately the texts assigned for this second Sunday of ordinary time are not particularly celebratory or father-friendly. Our Old Testament Lesson describes Abraham caving into Sarah's jealousy and sending Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness to die. This is followed by a gospel where Jesus seems to speak against family and against the commandment to honor our parents. When confronted with readings like these, the best thing to do is to dive right in. Let's start with the gospel.

Today Jesus is warning the apostles about the costs and challenges they will face in following him, the first of which will be leaving their families and their homes. This is not unlike the normal process of children graduating and moving away. Do you remember that moment when Jesus was in Nazareth and someone said to him (Matthew 12:47) that his mother and brothers were waiting outside and pointing to his disciples, he said, "These are my mother and my sisters and brothers?" If your heart broke the first time when your kids chose to hang out with friends rather than stay at home with family, you know the feelings these verses describe. Jesus knows the apostles are eager to leave the nest, get to work, and show the world what they can do. In this morning's baptismal service, we are giving Eloise the tools to do what the apostles would do - resist evil, love her neighbor, treat all people with dignity, and continually strive for justice and peace. Today this baptismal service is equipping us to do the same thing. Jesus is not asking the apostles to stop loving their parents or their siblings or themselves. Jesus is asking them to put a priority on God. Jesus is telling them that it is time to make God's mission their own. He is telling us the same thing.

Taking on God's mission is a challenging thing. The story of Abraham and Sarah shows that even the best of people can behave in the most horrible of ways. Being honest about that kind of history allows healing to begin. The problem is that moving toward healing will disrupt family systems that are content with keeping things quiet and maintaining the status quo.

When one person shifts to a healthier way of living, it throws everyone else off - and creates resistance and even anger as a result. This is what Jesus is talking about when he said that he

was not bringing peace but a sword. He knew that when they defined themselves, when they began to have integrity with who they were and what they believed, and when they started to do what they believed what God was calling them to do, his followers would experience pushback and pain. As said so well in our passage from Romans, doing these things lead to death... and also to life. It has been said that you can't grow spiritually until you have forgiven your parents (or yourself) for being human. It's not about letting them off the hook. It's about taking responsibility for your life, and defining who you are and who and what you will become. It has been said that God has no grandchildren. There comes a time when each of us need to take responsibility for what we believe and how we live ourselves. This is what the Baptismal questions challenge us to do. Notice that the Baptismal answer is "I will with God's help." When Hagar was in the wilderness, God showed her a well. God will do the same for us. Ishmael's time in the wilderness didn't kill him. It made him strong enough to lead a nation. In his maturity, he -- along with millions of his descendants in the Muslim faith -- was able to claim Abraham as his father and Abraham's God as his God. When it looked like Ishmael had no way out, God was with him, showing him a way in forward, blessing him on his journey, and giving him hope precisely when hope seemed hard to find. As a result, he persevered and not just survived but thrived. I think both his father and his heavenly father were proud. May the same be true for us.

[1] The older translations of this passage said, "Whoever does not hate father or mother... or son or daughter... or even their own life." It is important to understand that the Greek word "miseo," which is sometimes translated as "hate" actually means "to love less," not "hate" in a modern sense. (See examples in Genesis 29:31-35, Malachi 1:2.) For a good summary see <http://rcg.org/questions/p102.a.html> which uses the definition of "miseo" as "to love less" given in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. (Note the NRSV translation quoted above is using this definition, turned around "whoever loves father... more than me") Looking at words using their original meaning in the original context is crucial, especially for understanding the more challenging texts of the Bible.