

## Pride and Privilege

Genesis 21:8-21 Matthew 9: 35-38

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I am grateful for all those who are offering us advice. The news is full of people giving advice about the future and what needs changing and how to go about it. Emmanuel Acho, a former NFL player who has a Youtube series called “Comfortable Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man” was on Stephen Colbert and said that there are people who are racist, antiracists and passive antiracists. He says the passive antiracists are the worst because anti racists can infiltrate places he can’t and they don’t. If we see something we have to speak and those who don’t speak are in effect, the same as the racists. Along the same lines Wesley Lowry spoke on the news and said Blacks can’t deal anymore, whites have to deal. He’s hopeful about this because he sees less anger and more commitment. Or Jasmine Stringer on the CBS morning news when asked said she was and feels most people are upset, angry, hurt, crying, empathetic, asking what to do, how to fix? She says that these feelings are all the tip of the iceberg and we must look deeper and identify the problem, the feelings and be able to communicate honestly with self, family and friends—and if it gets to be too much seek professional help. She went on to say that we should know our boundaries—what we are comfortable talking about and what not. Self-care is important. Grace and empathy for yourself and others. As for actions she suggests know where you are on the iceberg, read a book, volunteer at a food shelf, donate money, look for places where you can learn more—YouTube, blogs, etc. Then there’s Kamryn Johnson who has made \$80,000 to help those who need it at this time. She and her friends make and sell bracelets. All these people I’ve mentioned are Black and these are just a few I’ve heard on TV recently. They are taking their time, their energy, their money to teach us how we can help change the world. I am so grateful for them, that generation, after generation Black people and Asian, Indigenous Americans and Hispanics keep trying to teach us that we’ve gotten it wrong. That

life shouldn’t be about fear, and hate, and anger, and violence, and oppression for anyone. And these fine people keep telling us that the racism, the white privilege within us doesn’t just hurt them, it hurts us and they keep teaching us with such grace, and thoughtfulness, and courage. They might be angry, but none of them talked with anger—passion, but not anger. As Amy shared last week, many must be tired. I am in awe. When will we learn this? What will it take? How many more people must die?

According to some historians we didn’t start out this way. This information is from “Birth of a White Nation” by Jacquelin Battalora. In the 1600s in Maryland and Virginia there wasn’t a race construct. It was more about class with many indentured servants and laborers both of European and African descent. They lived side by side, married, worked side by side. Nathaniel Bacon wanted to war against the Indigenous people, take their land but he also wanted redistribution of the wealth. Lower class people followed him into the Bacon Rebellion in Virginia in the 1670s. He was declared a rebel, lost his position on the Governor’s council. But even more insidious, this was followed with laws that pitted the Africans and European lower class against each other, taking away rights of the Africans but not the Europeans, thus creating a white race and a black race. The white people in the lower class then saw themselves as better than the black people in the lower class, though I understand there is no DNA that differentiates the races. We have seen this pattern repeated—that of pitting people of various ethnic, cultural, religious and racial heritage, against each other in order to weaken the poorer people and help the wealthier. This has included rounding up Indigenous people onto reservations and numerous breakages of treaties and various confrontations that we still see today like Standing Rock. Yes, various systems, many systems are broken to this day because of racism, but the white

privilege is a composite of racism and classism. As theologian and preacher James Forbes said at a college graduation—I've said this to some of you already, "racism is the intramural sport compared to classism." We find it difficult to talk about either racism or classism. And starting in the 60s economists, politicians and activists were often quoted as saying our system is "socialism for the rich and capitalism for the rest," and of course most of the wealthy are white.

Hagar and Ishmael. Hagar was Egyptian—a slave of Abraham's. It was understood at that time that if a woman like Sarah could not have a child, her servant or slave could be made to have sex with the husband and the child would be considered Sarah's. Hagar and Abraham had a son and his name was Ishmael. (Genesis 16) Later Sarah was told by God that she would conceive and bear a child. She laughed because she was too old—way too old. (Genesis 18) She did have a son—Isaac. Sarah became jealous and drove Hagar and Ishmael out as we read this morning. Ishmael survives and continues in the story. For example, both Isaac and Ishmael bury Abraham at his death (Genesis 25) and Ishmael's daughter Mahalath marries Esau, Isaac's grandson. (Genesis 28) Furthermore, Hagar is mentioned in Galatians comparing the free, right thinking woman—Sarah and the slave and wrong thinking woman Hagar. Then it says, "But what does the scripture say? Drive out the slave and her children; for the children of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman. So then, friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman. For Freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 4:21-5:1) I have to confess I don't remember reading this text until yesterday when I looked up Hagar in a concordance. I wonder how often these texts about Hagar have been used to justify oppression. And interesting that she is the mother of the son of Abraham for whom Islam traces their heritage back to Abraham.

Far too often scriptures are used to justify oppression. I'm sure I've said this before, in one of Carolyn Pressler's class I learned that God is on the side of the oppressed. When the scriptures justify

oppression, that is not God at work. When we use the texts to justify oppression that is not God at work.

This week Amy and I attended an Isaiah clergy training by ZOOM. The purpose was to suggest ways in which we can work together to create something different so not one more person is murdered. Real transformation means everyone can breathe. And we need hope, but in order to have hope we need to be doing something. We need to value our democracy and recognize that we are a multi-racial society and for it to work all people must be equal, have equal opportunities, not be judged by the color of one's skin. Then we all benefit. Then our society is stronger, better. But we must enter into the conversations with people. We'll keep you posted on possibilities through Isaiah. Joe Crowe is also working on this, and SoJO is looking into other possibilities, workshops on White Privilege and more. We think this work is difficult. Yes, it is, but never underestimate God. This story might surprise you.

Orv and I subscribe to the Week magazine which tells weekly news stories and quotes various news articles and editorials. Many of you know of Glenn Beck, former Fox News commentator, quite conservative in his views—has his own radio shows etc. This story is from a few years ago and I did look him up and I'm not sure he still believes this way. We can hope. "Glenn Beck has had a startling change of heart, said Nichole Schmidle in the New Yorker. The right-wing pundit built his career on attacking the Left, regularly launching conspiratorial rants on the Marxist-Islamist cabal plotting to take over America. He famously called Barack Obama a racist with "deep-seated hatred for white people." But Beck says he's undergone a philosophical transformation, partly as a result of listening to Obama talk about race. 'I did a lot of freaking out about Obama,' he says 'but Obama made me a better man.' Beck is now a full-throated supporter of Black Lives Matter. 'There are things unique to the African-American experience that I cannot relate to. I had to listen to them.' He thinks it's time Americans ended the cultural war, and re-adopted decency in public life. 'We have, as a culture embraced the bad guys. I love Tony

Soprano. But when a Tony Soprano shows up in your life, you don't love him so much.' Beck admits his hysterical punditry had a major role in the trend and in paving the way for a Donald Trump presidency. 'We'd made everything into a game show, and now we're reaping the consequence of it. So much of what I used to believe was either always a sham or has been made into a sham.'

We choose who we listen to. Who we listen to influences our decisions. God is also influencing us in every milli-second to bring about peace and harmony throughout the world. Do we listen to those who are advocating for violence, hatred and fear, or those who challenge us to loving, justice filled action? Do we open our hearts and minds to God's wisdom or do we close our minds and hearts to God? Do we work at putting loving- and justice-filled possibilities in the hearts and minds of others or do we do nothing? Do we work toward a world where the Hagars and Ishmaels are recognized as God's beloved children and are to be valued and free? Do we listen to the pain of the world at this time and pray for guidance and have comfortable uncomfortable conversations with Black friends,

acquaintances, strangers? Do we understand that we are responsible and need to deal? Do we recognize where we are on the iceberg and dig deeper to better understand our white privilege and what it means, how it's harming the whole world? We are the laborers Jesus is talking about in the Matthew text "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38) We are called.

My friends, there is such hope now. There is a change taking place and I know many of you have been part of this change. But we all must dig deeper at this time and take what action we can. Many of us are struggling to figure out what that is. The struggle is good for it will get us somewhere. And our openness to God is what can make the difference. That's where the hope is. Joy sang, we all must stand tall, stand as one, face our fears, love each other, protect our people. Kamryn Johnson when asked why she made the bracelets, she said to make other people happy and when asked why she said because God wants us to.

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