

Visions of Freedom

Scripture: Genesis 16:7 – 10

7/4/21 (YouTube only)

Let me share a little background about today's Bible story – Sarai & Abram want to have a child, a son. God has promised Abram that he and his true love, Sarai, would have many children. God promises that their children will be as many as stars in the night sky and Abram's children will be the leaders of many nations. But here is Abram and his soul mate, Sarai, with out a child. They have been trying – boy have they been trying – but Sarai's womb is as dry as a desert river bed.

Sarai decides to act on her own to give Abram a son so she comes up with a plan. Her plan is for Abram to have a son with her maidservant Hagar. Sarai plan, not God's plan, is for her to allow Hagar, her maidservant to sleep with Abram to have a child. Abram – being a man – says SURE! And Abram & Hagar get together and Hagar becomes pregnant. Sarai's plan is completed – at least at first – Sarai is happy for her husband, Abram, and her maidservant, Hagar. Everything seems fine but eventually jealousy comes into Sarai's heart and she begins to treat Hagar badly – very badly!

Now here the rest of the story:

After running away from her master Sarai, pregnant Hagar stops to rest beside a spring of water in the wilderness. Hagar experiences a vision of an angel of God who calls her by name. Since the angel knows Hagar's name and the angel knows Hagar is the maidservant of Sarai – why does the angel continue asking Hagar where she has come from and where she is going? Does this angel know something about Hagar that she herself does not yet know?

Hagar ran away from Sarai and Abram because she wanted to be free. Yet the angel directs her to return to Sarai and Abram. The angel then promises to bless her descendents.

What was the angel thinking? Hagar had fled seeking safety because of the danger of Sarai's abuse. Escaping an unsafe environment was Hagar's plan. Hagar chooses to struggle for survival alone in the wilderness while she is pregnant rather than to be a slave. It is disturbing that Hagar's vision of freedom is interrupted by the angel's directions to return and be submissive to Sarai.

There are many Biblical passages that speak to the master/slave relationship. These passages recall times in history when our ancestors have been masters, slaves, or exiles.

We cannot ignore the disturbing realities of power used to oppress people in the Bible. In today's world we deal with a lot of human trafficking.

We, modern people, could pose the very question the angel asks Hagar and we could apply it to our own history of slavery, racism, and oppression created by systemic inequalities.

Several years ago I went on a mission trip to India to work at a Christian hospital and English speaking school there. Before leaving on the trip, I was given information that India has the highest rate of female trafficking in the world.

On that mission trip to India, I ask myself these questions – Where have I come from and where am I going? I asked these questions of myself after a 15-hour flight, after landing in Rampor and seeing all the people in the streets there, after traveling 2 more hours on extremely bumpy roads, after having to stop several times on the trip to the hospital & school to wait for cows, pigs, or dogs to get out of the way, and after getting my first night sleep with a gecko run back & forth on the ceiling about my head.

My question was more – I know where I have come from, so why am I here and where am I going?

How has your history shaped your understanding of what it means to be free, to be equal, and to be a citizen of the world? How has your vision of freedom come into being? And where do you need to go if things are to change?

How has our history shaped our understanding of what it means to be free, to be equal, and to be a citizen of the world? How has our vision of freedom come into being? And where do we need to go if things are to change?

I chose to go to India and I discovered what it means to be free, to be equal, and to be a citizen of the world through the eyes of the children there and those people at the hospital. I saw the vision of freedom in each face I encountered there. Where do you need to go to change the world?

I think some of you will be surprised that you do not need to travel half way around the world to discover what it means to be free, to be equal, and to be a citizen of the world. I think you will find what it means to be free, to be equal, and to be a citizen of the world on the boardwalk here in Bethany or in your neighborhood or in our church.

Often, we think mission work is a far away thing. We think we have to board a plane to do mission work. I am suggesting that all you need to do is pick up your phone and call someone you have not spoke to in a while or walk to your neighbor's house and talk with them or get in your car and drive to a shut-in home and visit him/her.

That's mission work!

Yes, just open your eyes and see the glory all around you especially on July 4th with fireworks going off all around us.

Let us pray;

Dear God of the slave and the exile, strengthen us for the long walk home to freedom. Let us have a vision of freedom in what ever path you chose for us. Set us free to share our faith in you and your Son; AMEN.