

Tell in the Light

Part 2A - June 25, 2023

Genesis 21:8-21

⁸ *The child grew and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.” ¹¹ The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹² But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. ¹³ As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.” ¹⁴ So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.*

¹⁵ *When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.*

¹⁸ *Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.*

²⁰ God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. ²¹ He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴ “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶ “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.



Today we begin the second sub-section of our summer worship series, “The Path of the Disciple.” The first sub-section was titled “The Weight of the Call.” During these two weeks we talked about hearing and responding to our call – be that to vocational ministry or to ministering to others as a part of our everyday life. We talked about the ways to be “church” outside the physical walls of the church and about how the call to minister can be stinky and challenging and difficult. These are all a part of the weight of the call. Today we transition into the second part of this series as we begin “Learning to Grow.” These three weeks will help us to understand that becoming a disciple of Jesus isn’t an instantaneous event, but a lifelong process. John Wesley called it sanctification, or “moving on to perfection in love.” As we prepare to dive into today’s message, “Tell in the Light,” let us pray...

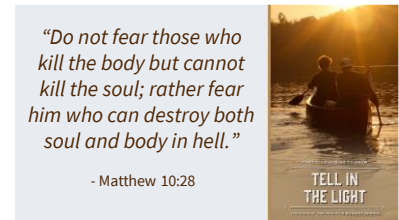
In verse 27 in our gospel text we read, *“What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.”* As we explore what it means to “tell in the light,” let us begin with this key verse. As most of you have undoubtedly experienced, there are some things we are willing to shout and there are some things that we would rather whisper. But in this verse, we aren’t whispering – we are the shouters. God and the Holy Spirit whisper to us. We proclaim the good news. God speaks in the dark. We are to tell in the light.

“What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.”
- Matthew 10:27



Now, maybe you read this verse and think it’d be easier just to quietly pass along what God or the Spirit shares with us. But faith is not easy. Jesus, in fact, says just the opposite. In the gospels Jesus never said, ‘This will be easy! Don’t worry!’

In the next verse in our text today Jesus says, *“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* Jesus is brutally honest about the opposition that we can face and about the consequences of bowing to the fear that oppression and persecution can bring. Jesus encourages us not to fear our fellow human beings – those that can kill the body. Instead he encourages us to fear Satan – the one who can kill both body and soul. Here Jesus is inviting us to consider the eternal consequences of choosing fear over faith.



Our passage today connects into the call that we have been looking at these past two weeks. The passage today begins and ends with the missional call to be Christ to the world. In

verse 25 Jesus states, *“It is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher.”* He closes with these words: *“Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”* These bookend statements emphasize the call to be like Jesus. In between these two verses, Jesus tells us that we will be maligned and called names, that we will have people that are against our faith – even members of our own households. And yet the call remains to be like Jesus, to be willing to give our whole lives away.

And there will be conflict, Jesus says. In verse 34 he plainly tells the disciples, *“I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* Some of the conflict is familial. In the next verse Jesus tells us that he has come to set father against son, daughter against mother, and so on. We are not being told to hate our parents or our children here. Jesus is using these words to emphasize the magnitude of this decision to follow him.

In verse 37 Jesus says that if we “*love father or mother... son or daughter... more than*” Jesus, then we are not worthy of following him. Jesus is saying that he must be #1 in our lives. To that point, we must add ‘self’ into this list. Jesus is also giving a warning here. There is a cost to discipleship. That cost may mean losing connection with family members, it may cost us friends. Jesus cannot guarantee that when we decide to live for him that everyone we know will be a great big fan. Some will distance themselves from us. The sword or the word sometimes divides. Jesus is being clear here. He is asking us to choose him over all else.

While that may feel like a me-against-the-world kind of thing, it is not. First of all, we would surely lose that battle. We are not strong enough to take on the humanity inside of ourselves, never mind taking on the world. It is not about taking on the one who can destroy the body and the soul either. Jesus has already fought and won that battle. And to add more assurance, Jesus reminds us that the creator and the power behind the whole universe is for us. Reminding his followers that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without God taking note, Jesus goes on to remind us that we are “*of more value than many sparrows.*” The God who is in control of everything has an eye on you and me. So we need not fear. If God, who has the power of life and death and eternity cares about sparrows, then we the beloved, we who are made in God’s image, then we truly have nothing to fear.

This is one of the main points that Jesus is making in today’s gospel passage. It is not about the enemies that lurk – here on earth or in the heavenly realms. It is really about the one who stands with us and is present to us and is for us. Our ever-present God is on our side in a way that empowers us and sustains us, that equips and guides us.

God is on our side in an “is there anything impossible with God?” kind of way. God is on our side in a “shout it from the rooftops, tell it in the light” kind of way.

Now, with that confidence and assurance, let’s read verse 27 again: *“What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.”* What God

“What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.”

- Matthew 10:27



speaks into the secret place of our hearts, we are to tell in the light. What the Spirit whispers quietly in our ear, we are to shout from the rooftops. Even though we do not have all the answers, Jesus still calls us to be bold for our faith. Even though we do not have all the answers, Jesus tells us to go on as if we do – because we know where the answers can be found.

The guidance and direction, the answers and reassurance that we need from time to time – OK, all the time – can be found right where the early Methodists found it: in God’s word and in the sacraments. John Wesley believed that “all Christians needed to feast both upon the Word of God in scripture, hearing it preached and meditating upon it in prayer, and upon the symbols of God’s love in the sacrament of Holy Communion” ([Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision](#), page 80). To allow people to feast upon the word, John and Charles Wesley built “preaching houses” – simple buildings for believers to gather in. Author Paul Chilcote describes the purpose of these houses: “Methodist people, hungry for guidance and inspiration in their lives, gathered, sometimes daily, for early-morning scripture study and preaching that shaped their thoughts and actions throughout the day.”

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- [Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision](#), page 82



Although done alone for many of us, this sounds a lot like my morning quiet time. Hungry for guidance and inspiration, eager to be shaped by God for the day ahead, I rise early each day to pray and read, to meditate and write. It is nothing fancy. There is nothing much to it, really, other than time spent alone with God. And yet my day would not be the same without my quiet time. It leads me to ask: Are you hungry for the word? Are you eager for God's direction in your life?

Chilcote goes on to write, "The small groups of early Methodists were little more than Bible study and prayer groups, designed to expand the menu of their spiritual nourishment" (page 82). This sounds a lot like what happens here on Wednesday and Thursday evenings and on Friday mornings as small groups gather here at Grace to feast on the word of God. Like daily quiet time, small groups are just one more way that we can grow in our faith and in our walk with the Lord.

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- Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision, page 82



For the Wesleys and for the early Methodists, reading and meditating on the Word of God was not a means unto itself. In the same way, daily quiet time or participation in a small group is not something we do to just check something off a list. Oh no. There was always a greater good, a God-sized purpose to time spent with God. Here is an

observation from a contemporary of those early Methodists:

"They made sure to put into practice whatever discovery about themselves they had made... The movement of their lives was always from reading, meditation, and

contemplation to action. They had discovered that love was a verb – something put into action" (page 84).

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- Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision, page 84



Those early Methodists, they lived love out loud. Their daily disciplines led them to be like Jesus in the world. Wouldn't it be just awesome if that is what others said about our daily disciplines and our walk of faith?



We began this time together looking at how Jesus was brutally honest about the cost of discipleship. We also were reminded that we are not alone, that God is ever-present to

us, leading and guiding us. Through faith and trust in God, we are called to tell in the light the good news of Jesus Christ. Turn with me now to Genesis 21, to a really difficult and challenging passage. Just to catch you up, most recently, Isaac has been born and has been circumcised and has been weaned. This day in our text, Sarah observes Isaac playing with Ishmael, the child born to Abraham and Hagar, Sarah's slave girl. Ishmael is a little older than Isaac. Ishmael was Abraham and Sarah's response to God taking a bit too long to make them into a great nation. Taking matters into her own hands, Sarah had Abraham sleep with Hagar.

In today's passage Sarah says to Abraham, *"Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac."* Can you tell that

Ishmael is not her own flesh and blood? But he is Abraham's flesh and blood. That is why Abraham is very distressed. It is then that Abraham's ever-present God intervenes, assuring him that, yes, Isaac is the offspring that shall fulfill the promise made 25 years ago. And then, God shows care for Hagar and Ishmael too. God assures Abraham that Ishmael will also become a nation, because *"he is your offspring"* too.

"Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac."
- Genesis 21:10



So early the next morning Abraham casts out Hagar and Ishmael, sending them into the wilderness, into the desert, with bread and a skin of water. Well, it is the desert and it was just some bread and a water skin. Soon Hagar and Ishmael are the ones who are distressed. Hagar sits Ishmael under a bush and goes a little way off to lie under her own bush. She says mostly to herself, *“Do not let me look on the death of a child.”* Hagar thinks this is the end. Cast off from the only people she knows, now without bread or water, she is resigned to the fact that she and her son will die here in the desert.

She weeps. Ishmael weeps. And the ever-present God of Abraham becomes present to Hagar. An angel of God comes from heaven, encouraging her and saying to Hagar, *“Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.”* God sees even this Egyptian slave girl and her son. God sees their need and provides water for Hagar and Ishmael. And God continues to walk with them. Ishmael grows up and marries. He becomes the father of one of the other great nations. The nation of Islam traces its roots back to Ishmael.

*“Come, lift up the boy
and hold him fast with
your hand, for I will
make a great nation
of him.”*

- Genesis 21:18



Hagar was driven out into the wilderness to die because she and her child had become an inconvenience. And maybe even more so, they were also a constant reminder of a failure of faith, of a moment when Sarah had taken matters into her own hands instead of trusting God. For both reasons, Hagar and Ishmael were oppressed and they were marginalized. And yet God saw them. And God heard their cry. And God responded to their needs. Our ever-present God was there for the innocent, for the abused.

As we reflect on who God would see in our world today and as we reflect on our Methodist roots as people who see those who Christ would see and love and care for, may we learn to grow in our faith practices. As we invest in the word of God through quiet time and Bible study, may we be people empowered and equipped to tell in the light the good news and hope that we find in our faith. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Who, like Sarah or Hagar, is one with whom you do not get along? How are you handling the discord? What can you do to reconcile the situation?
- 2) *Pray*. When have you or where are you encountering distress or suffering because of your faith? Pray to have the strength to be found worthy of Christ.
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 14:26-27. How are the words/feel of these verses different than those we read in Matthew 10:37-39? How does this change your understanding?