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June 21, 2026- 4th Sunday After Pentecost, 7A
Christ Church Quaker Farms, Oxford, CT

Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17; Romans 6:1b-11; **Matthew 10:24-39**

Cast out this slave woman with her son;
for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac. †

The opposite of love is not hate… its *fear*. And fear is the root of so much that is evil in this world. Fear is the driving force behind power in society, in our economy and increasingly in politics and government action throughout the world. From the moment we are born into this world, we learn to fear— to fear things around us, to fear what is different from us, to fear the stranger, to fear those who may have authority over us. And for those in power in our societies, fear has been one of their best tools since the beginning of civilization— from the time of Abraham and Sarah, through that of the Roman Empire when Jesus walked among us, to the present day. Those in power have long recognized the capacity of fear to divide people, and to ensure conformity to the structures of society, the status quo, even when it does not serve our best interests. And Jesus makes it clear in today's Gospel that fear among his disciples will lead to failure.

It's easy to feel forgotten and abandoned in the midst of the chaos that exists in the world. And we become more afraid when we try to fit into 'the system' (the *cosmos*) that seems to prevail around us. He warns, 'those who think they've found their life in this world will lose it and those who lose it for my sake will find it.' He is honest about what will happen, predicting conflict and suffering ahead, yet gives hope by referencing small sparrows, seemingly minor in the scope of things, yet precious and important to God. What really matters is simplicity, vulnerability and dependence on God, as exhibited by the sparrows. It's not about dependence on men or powerful figures in our society, or even dependence on our own strength— what matters is our dependence upon God. And such deference to God will certainly lead to suffering, to shame and humiliation in society and families, and great opposition from the world and its prevailing powers.

The passage we heard from Genesis today conveys a similar message. I found it striking, given our present societal conflicts over racism and inclusion and conflicts in the Middel East… it is the story of the exile of Hagar and Ishmael. I wonder, what's the motivation behind their exile? The story depicts Ishmael 'mocking' Issac… yet the roots of the HBW word here can mean to 'mock' but other parts can mean 'laugh' and there's a word play here- ***metsachaq*** can also mean 'to laugh and play,' which is the root of the name Isaac. Some claim Sarah was upset because Ishmael was mocking her child, whereas some scholars read it that Ishmael was joyfully laughing with his half-brother, enjoying their relationship. Perhaps the two were simply playing together, innocent of social distinctions and barriers between them… when Sarah became jealous, believing that her son should be the Egyptian's superior. Whatever was going on, it's clear that Sarah was upset by it… there was *fear*.

And as a result, Hagar the slave and her son Ishmael are cast out into the wilderness. That was strangely harsh. But God does not abandon them. God hears the cry of Hagar, and her suffering brings redemption. According to these Hebrew Scriptures, her son becomes the father of great Arab and African nations, nations and people that are different from Israel. This story emphasizes that God's love goes beyond any one community or race; beyond Sarah's family, beyond Israel. God's loves the Hagars and Ishmaels of the world as much as the Sarahs and Issacs. God loves those who are different, and those who are most vulnerable. God loves the Hagars and Ishmaels of the world, and so should we.

I'm not sure about you, but I've been closing watching and enjoying the FIFA World Cup games. So many different nations and cultures competing with each other while displaying great sportsmanship and respect. Sure, there is cheering and jeering going on, and there have been great differences in political view and national rivalry, yet the players all have shown great respect for each other. Shaking hands, hugging at the end of the matches; they model a respect that is so lacking in this day and age. Such respect stems from self-knowledge, confidence in oneself, and not from fear.

So, I admit, I was bothered that today's Gospel passage ends with Jesus speaking about bringing 'a sword' and causing divisions within households… This part is so unnerving, and it's meant to be! His point is that being a true disciple involves following Jesus, rather than society, and this will cause great division in households and in society.
To be disciples of Jesus is to take on Jesus' way of life—the way of love, not fear— and also the Way of the Cross. To be true disciples is to suffer for the sake of following the Way. Remember 1st Century Christians were known as the 'People of the Way.' They were to follow Jesus' Way, to identify with the marginalized (slaves, rebels, poor) in society, to accept and embrace those whom the powerful deem unimportant, the Hagars and Ishmaels of the world. Remember his words, "those who lose their life for my sake will, in fact, find it."

Recognize the façade of human power and power struggles. Learn the lesson behind the story of Ishmael— God's love goes beyond any one community or race. Call out the hate mongers and understand that their actions are about fear, not love. Disciples of Jesus Christ understand the only answer to fear is love. Do not fear… 'nothing is hidden which shall not be known… what I speak to you in the darkness tell in the light.'
In other words, the truth will always set you free!

Recognize God in everyone around you. Embrace the truth of God's presence in this world, which is manifest not by power or popularity, but through mercy and compassion. We are called by Jesus not to give into fear, but to work toward fulfilling God's mission of love and reconciliation and allow the Good News of Jesus Christ to shape our lives and turn us— from doubt to faith, from rejection to acceptance, from fear to love. God loves the Hagars and Ishmaels of this world, and so should we! ✝