

Where Did I Come From? And Where Am I Going?

Happy New Year!! On Sunday, for our New Year's reflection sermon, we focused on two key questions that the angel of the Lord posed to Hagar at a key turning point in her life.

1. Warm-up Question: Have you made any New Year's Resolutions or any New Year's "Un-Resolutions"?
2. Read Genesis 16:1-6. Try to imagine the backstory here. Abram and Sarai desperately wanted a child. God had promised a child. But time was ticking and still no child. They assumed Sarai was barren.
 - a. How do you imagine the stress of being childless affected the relationship between Abram and Sarai? What may have motivated Sarai to offer Hagar to Abram as a concubine?
 - b. Hagar was a slave taken from her home in Egypt, purchased by Abram to serve Sarai. How do you think Hagar felt about being a slave? How do you think she may have felt when Sarai announced she was "giving" Hagar to Abram as his concubine?
 - c. What do you make of verse 4? Was this real or projection on Sarai's part?
 - d. What do you make of Sarai's reaction in verse 5?
 - e. What do you make of Abram's reaction in verse 6?
 - f. Abram and Sarai are traditionally regarded as great heroes of our faith. How does this story make you feel about them?
 - g. Have you ever known someone in your own life who had great faith, but also had some deep shortcomings? Tell us about that person.
 - h. What should we learn about ourselves from all this?
3. Read Genesis 16:7-16.
 - a. In your mind's eye, how do you picture the angel that appeared to Hagar?
 - b. The angel asks Hagar, "Where did you come from and where are you going?" Jeff said, "I love the way the angel links those two questions. Implicit in their linkage is the recognition that where we have been invariably affects where we're going." Do you agree or disagree – and why?
 - c. Think of a formative experience from your past that has had a positive impact in shaping the direction of your life. Tell us what happened and how it has affected you.

- d. Hagar’s reaction to her negative experience with Abram and Sarai was to run away. That’s a very natural reflexive impulse. But the angel tells her to go back. On a practical level, for the sake of her survival, why going back good advice?
 - e. What did God promise Hagar if she summoned the courage to return?
4. From this story, Jeff drew the idea that, to experience God’s best for us in the present, we often have to return to the scene of painful experiences in our past, instead of running from them. We return to them to work through the pain, learn lessons, and let go. Equally important, we try to identify – and undo – distorted patterns of thought and behavior we may have developed to cope with the pain of past experiences that hang on long after the pain of the past is gone.
- a. In his novel “The Sea,” John Banville says, “The past beats inside me like a second heart.” What do you think that means?
 - b. Jeff encouraged each of us take time to work through a three-part process of self-examination. By way of example, let’s let a few people in the group (who are comfortable doing so) share their answers to these three questions, so we all get the feel for the process.
 - i. Call to mind a really painful experience in your past. What was that experience?
 - ii. Do you feel you have faced the pain of that experience, worked through it, learned from it, and let it go, or is that pain still churning within you? How did you work through to let it go? What did you learn from it?
 - iii. Even after you’ve let go of the pain, it’s important to consider: What patterns of thought or behavior did I develop to cope with that painful experience that still hold sway over me and distort my life? Jeff gave the example of how his embarrassment at being categorized as a sissy caused him to overcompensate by being a “people pleaser” who never wants to disappoint people or ever to say anything people don’t want to hear. How ‘bout you? What negative patterns emerged from your painful experience? Are you working to correct those patterns? If so, how?
5. In the end, Hagar calls the God who met her in her hour of need “El-roi,” which means “God who sees.” She named her son Ishmael, which means “God hears.” Why do you suppose she picked those names?

***Take some time this week to prepare a personal Soul Care Plan for 2018.
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