

IV Lent 2021

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Galatians 4.21-31 St. John 6.1-14



It's time to lighten things up a bit. We're now at the mid point of the Season of Lent. Today we set aside some of our Lenten fasts and disciplines and celebrate with hope and joy.

The *Book of Common Prayer* doesn't give any alternative names to the Fourth Sunday in Lent. Anglicans know this day by four other unique names:

- *Mothering Sunday*...from Paul's Letter to the Galatians, in which he calls the heavenly Jerusalem our mother,
- *Refreshment Sunday*...from the Gospel in which Jesus feeds and "refreshes" thousands of people,
- *Rose Sunday*...from the rose colored vestments worn at Mass and pink flowers decorating the High Altar,
- *Laetare Sunday*...from the original Latin opening words to the Introit, "Rejoice with Jerusalem; be glad for her, all you who love this city!"...a direct quote from Isaiah.

Each of these special names for the Fourth Sunday in Lent are instructive...and prepare us for what's coming next.

The Epistle makes for a challenging read for 21st Century Christians...even in a modern translation such as the Good News Bible. Most Christians today do not come from a Jewish background. Paul's allegorical treatment of the story of Sarah and Hagar is intended to teach us we can't put ourselves right with God. The only way we are put right with God is through Jesus...the promised Messiah of the Hebrew Bible.

The Ten Commandments are still binding on Christians. But the words written on stone tablets...or in our case the Bible...can't save us. We have a tendency to make God's word something we follow when it's convenient. Only the love that results from our faith in Christ can lead us to conduct ourselves in a way words can't.

In the story of Sarah and Hagar, God promised Abraham and Sarah they would have a child in their old age. Sarah thought that was the funniest thing she ever heard since they were both in their 80's. She figured God really meant for Abraham to have to have a baby with her servant girl, Hagar, which he did. Let's just say that eventually

created some household tension. God kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah...they did have a baby in their old age...his name was Isaac. God always keeps his promise.

The place we first learn God has kept his promise through Jesus and set us free from sin and death is in Church. We often say "Holy Mother Church"...and indeed she is our Mother. Saint Paul calls the Church on Earth "the present city of Jerusalem"...the Church on Earth is the visible representation of Heaven...globally and here at Saint Joseph Parish.

Just before a man is ordained a priest, the bishop reads a long Exhortation, out loud, for everyone to hear. He tells the priest he is to "teach, and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ forever." It's the job of the Church on Earth to point the way to what Paul calls "the heavenly Jerusalem, our True Mother."

Mothers know how to take care their children and their needs and so does Jesus. In the Gospel, Jesus knew the people who were following him around were hungry. He didn't want to send them home without food. He took two tiny fish and five loaves of bread and fed many thousands of people. Jesus knows food is part of what we need to enjoy life now. He asks us to trust God to provide the things we need. The crowd in today's Gospel went home full and refreshed after a good meal.

Before the people went home, Jesus told his disciples to pick up all of the leftover bread... nothing was going to waste...nothing was thrown out. Through Jesus all people regardless of their pedigree are made perfect and complete and included in his plan for salvation. God does not want to see anyone left out of the basket.

Finally, rose-colored vestments, flowers at the High Altar (flowers are not seen during Lent except for today), and the opening words to the Introit..."Rejoice"...introduce an element of hope into our Lenten journey. Next Sunday we begin Passiontide...the darkest days of Lent leading to Good Friday. But there is more...we can see light through the darkness...Easter is coming!

That should give us every reason to rejoice!

