



21/06/2020

GENESIS 21: 8-21

THEME: HOW MUCH AM I WORTH?

(This week we are going to try and engage in one of those sensitive topics inspired by the information from EAP services newsletter send to us by the Methodist Church this week – the Problem of bullying)

GATHERING

Gracious Lord,

As we gather for this special worship time together,

Help us to feel You close.

Help us to hear You better.

Guide, strengthen and prepare us

To commune with you. **Amen.**

HYMN: HOPE IS OUR SONG - 63

How much am I worth? What is the value of me?

Do I count if I stand or fall?

If I'm weak or strong, if I win or lose

Am I someone, or no one at all?

I am worth everything, everything, everything

I am worth everything in the eyes of God

You are worth everything, everything, everything

We are worth everything in the eyes of God.

I am that bird that dropped to the ground

The tiniest bird of them all

And nobody knew, and nobody cared

But our Father, who cares for us all.

Refrain

I am that stone that fell from a ring

That was precious beyond all compared
And they hunted the house, they cried out with joy
When they saw it, still gleaming down there.

Refrain

I am that child who felt lost and afraid
When she saw how far she had roamed
But they scoured the hills till they found her again
And rejoicing, they brought her safe home.

Refrain

How much am I worth? Do I matter at all?
When I am thinking it through I may see
That I'm worth all the love of the Son of God,
Who laid down his life just for me.

Refrain

HOW MUCH AM I WORTH?

How much am I worth? Do I matter at all? Why am I being bullied?
The question WHY can be very difficult to answer but the truth is: Of
cause, we are all worth so much and very much loved by God.
“we are God’s handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works
which God prepared in advance for us to accomplish.” We are created
in God’s image and likeness to show Christ’s love to the world around
us.”

What bullying does is the complete opposite – it instils pain, fear and a
sense of worthlessness in others.

The harmful effects of bullying on physical and mental wellbeing are
significant and long-lasting.

When we laugh at someone, they feel pain.

When we pick on someone they are angry but also afraid.

**When we don’t stick up for someone who is being bullied, they are
alone.**

Let us remember that we bully because we want to feel strong, the boss.
But are we? What have we done?

We have forgotten our own fear by making others frightened.

We have forgotten our own loneliness by leaving one of us alone.

We have hidden our own nightmare in another's terror.

It is no longer enough to be sorry.

It is no longer enough to boast and swagger.

These attitudes are not what Christ expect of us.

Loving God, forgive us and restore us.

Help us to be advocates of just interactions

May we have the courage to confront ourselves in the 'not me', 'don't want to know', 'it's their problem', 'I'm not involved'.

May we have the courage to confront ourselves in the 'I'm right', 'My way; 'My word', 'My voice'.

For we are all hurt, all afraid, all alone, all different, all me, and the world is all ours.

We all have only one life.

Lord, help us to be advocates of just interactions

PRAYER

Lord, as we gather in worship today, we bring you our thanks and praise for your being in our lives and seeing us through the past week. Today, we remember before you, a challenge that seem to be escalating by the day in all areas of our lives – the problem of bullies – in schools, colleges, workplaces and even in our homes. We pray for all those who are living their lives in fear of certain individuals – what they might do or say. We pray for your intervention Lord, and for each of us to be true channels of your love.

Help us to see every person as made in your image and likeness - and is special and unique before Lord.

Help us to see you in every person's eyes, especially in the eyes of those who suffer because of mean words or mean actions they have experienced or are still experiencing.

Father, You are our Rock, Fortress and Saviour - gracious in all that You do. Protect the vulnerable and may those in decision making positions have wisdom to set policies that seek to promote the wellbeing of all.

May your love and grace be known to all. **Amen.**

CHILDREN'S TIME – (1) *Team Challenge*

(2) LOOPY CHURCH WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT –

(adapted from a poem by Michael Leunig – When I talk to You)

Hark all you children, all you our parents

Hark to the words of our Lord.

Let us remain truthful children of God

In order to remain truthful,

We must do more than speak the truth.

We must hear truth.

That bullying is not right.

We must also receive truth

That Jesus expect us to love one another.

We must also act upon truth

By standing and speaking against bullying.

If you have been bullied

I pray for you my friends

Our God is always with you

I pray he will take care of you

I encourage you,

Leave the outhouse of despair,

where low lighting hides **your true colours!**

Leave the outhouse of despair,

And come outside

to the playground of possibilities!

Roll in the mud if you must!

Swing from the trees if you will!

Slide, slip twirl, twist bounce!

Be unrestrained in embracing

the recreational potential.

See the rainbow colours of life

reflected in a puddle.

Admire the skipping squirrels

and seek to emulate her glide and verve.

Don't let the tormentors bring you down!

This playground is yours to enjoy too.
You were made for this!
Be unrestrained in embracing
the recreational potential.
Yes, this can be a playground of possibilities
A playground of divine recreational potentials.
Yes, in the playground God also hears!
Hark all you children, all you our parents!
Hark to the words of our Lord!

HYMN

Pass me not, O gentle Saviour,
Hear my humble cry;
While on others Thou art calling,
Do not pass me by.

Refrain:

*Saviour, Saviour,
Hear my humble cry,
While on others Thou art calling,
Do not pass me by.*

Let me at Thy throne of mercy
Find a sweet relief;
Kneeling there in deep contrition,
Help my unbelief.

Refrain

Trusting only in Thy merit,
Would I seek Thy face;
Heal my wounded, broken spirit,
Save me by Thy grace.

Refrain

BIBLE READING: Genesis 21: 8-21

HYMN – *We sing the last verse of Pass me not O Gentle Saviour.*

Thou the spring of all my comfort,
More than life to me,
Whom have I on earth beside Thee,
Whom in Heav'n but Thee.

*Saviour, Saviour,
Hear my humble cry,
While on others Thou art calling,
Do not pass me by.
Refrain*

REFLECTION

Our lesson today comes from one of those Bible passages that makes a very uncomfortable reading but at the same time it challenges us to do an introspection of our conduct starting from our family setting to our social, school, college, work, and even church. It just challenges us to pause and reflect on the impact of our words, actions or inactions to those we relate with.

Hagar found herself at the receiving end of Sarah's bullish attitude that came in the form of not only her actions but also her choice of words.

Actions: – She saw her son playing with the son of Hagar and she didn't like the look of it. So, she lashed out..... But the way she went about to me, seems a bit cynical – because she asked her husband Abraham to get rid of Hagar!!

Words: – verse 10 - (1) **Cast Out** – (2) **This** (3) **Slave Woman** –with her (3) **Son**;for the son of THIS SLAVE WOMAN shall not inherit along with **my son Isaac**. She was not mincing her words! She was brutal. She was bullish and abusive.

It is sad that even to this date bullying has not stopped but instead increased as it penetrates our contemporary communication mediums

such as twitter, Facebook, emails, texts etc. With our increased use of technology – cyberbullying has also increased. It is one of the unfortunate realities of our time – there are people who enjoy, who find pleasure in pushing others around!!

Children deal with bullies every day at school. Some then come home to a bully in the home.

People work with bullies on their jobs.

Some of our friends are bullies.

There are bullies among our neighbours.

Bullies inhabit every sphere of our lives, even in church.

One can then ask: What impact does bullying have?

Let us refer back to our story for today. When Abraham was bullied into sending Hagar packing, he was very distressed (v11) – But that didn't stop Sarah to push-on with her intensions. It was as if Abraham couldn't find a way to escape Sarah's claws – and so, we read in v11 that Abraham was distressed! It seems Sarah had terrified him and he didn't have a choice – but to abide by she was demanding!

This can apply to you and me; it can apply to us in our homes; in our schools; in our work-place; in our social gatherings and social networks - there are people who loom large in our minds, to the point where we actually fear them and what they might do to us. It is sad that there are such people in life that leave other people paralyzed with fear? And I think most of us have been under their spell at one time or the other.

Another impact of bullying is that, it strips another person of his or her worth and dignity, reducing them to a joke or a punchline as their name is at times, replaced with a label. As in our Bible reading we hear Sarah using not so nice choice of words: (v10) “..Cast Out – (2) This (3) Slave Woman –with her (3) Son;for the son of THIS SLAVE WOMAN shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.”

From where I come from, we have a saying that translate something like” An axe may not remember the number of trees it knocked down but a tree will never forget”. Meaning the marks left as the axe was chopping will remain visible for a very long time. Our words do have the same effect and I think this is why James (James 3: 1-12) warns Christians to watch their tongue “... the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits..... How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire. The tongue is a fire..... a restless evil, full of deadly poison...” James encouragement is for us to be quick to listen and slow to anger, to bridle our tongues (James 1: 19-26).

Also commenting on the impact of words, Solomon says, “The words of the wicked are a deadly ambush... like sword thrusts... death and life are in the power of the tongue..... A cruel tongue breaks the spirit,” “and a broken spirit – who can bear it?” The words of the wise, however, “bring healing... and deliverance... a gentle tongue is a tree of life, and a truthful witness,” and it saves lives.” (Prov 12:6, 18; 14:25; 15:4; 18:14, 21).

Bullying also have severe impact on mental health as well. When Hagar was forced to walk away, she and her son Ishmael became homeless, with limited food resources she reached a breaking point and she almost gave up living. In verse 15 we read: “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 at the death of a child” Bullying had driven her this far – to contemplate death for her son and as well as herself. Bullying destroys and drive people to commit suicide. When people are victims of bullying they can become depressed, scared, or less innovative as they succumb to pressure.

How then do we deal with bullies?

Apart from following the policies and procedures of the setting in which we operate – eg schools have their policies to adhere to, work places, different organisations as well as us as a church – we also ask ourselves: What would Jesus do? And for me the story of the good Samaritan springs to mind.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan can be understood as a starting place. The Good Samaritan stops and he cared for the beaten man. I think Jesus would like us to do something about it, not to pretend as if we haven't noticed. I think, we ought to act, to do what we can to help any given situation. A child being bullied is your child – from where I come from we strongly believe that it takes a village to raise up a child.

You witness a children illtreating another child, don.t just look on because then it will be deduced as a sign of approval for the bad behaviour.

Paul, reminds us that “we are God’s handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to accomplish.” We are created in God’s image and likeness to show Christ’s love to the world around us (Ephesians 2:10). Every time we look away from someone who is, hurting; **And every time we see words being used as weapons, and we say nothing; Every time we distance ourselves from those being bullied,** let us be reminded of Jesus’ words when he said: **“I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.”** In other words, in the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no room for demeaning others, there is no room for bullying.

In conclusion, let us be encouraged by the fact that, God is always with us, even when all seem to be null and void. When Hagar and her son Ishmael were at that point of thinking that there was nothing worth living for, when they had reached that point of hopelessness – God spoke to her – suddenly she discerned God’s intensions for, not only her life but also for her son Ishmael. “Do not be afraid.... Come lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand for I will make a great nation of him” Genesis 21: 17-18). Suddenly she had this conviction of a bigger, mightier, and stronger being who can pull her through and out of the depth of her overwhelming depression and hopelessness. ...
(Sing My God is so big, so mighty and so strong .. there nothing my

God cannot do). Suddenly, she noticed water not far from where she was sitting, suddenly things became clearer to her!! How much am I worth? How much is my son worth? Hager could have been asking.... But now she knew how much she was worth! She was worth of God's love and providence and so is you and me. If we ever find ourselves pushed beyond our limits by bullying of any nature, let us always remember, God loves us with his being, so we have a special place in his Kingdom. You were redeemed with a special price of Jesus' blood because you are worth God's love.

But I also encourage us to create environment in our homes, our workplaces, our schools, our organisations, our social groups; our church – environment where bulling has no place. Environment safe for all to experience God's love. **Amen.**

HYMN: AA 59 (*When we get to the highlighted words, may we please sing with emphasis*)

He came singing love
And he lived singing love
He died singing love
He arose in silence
For the love to go on
We must make it our song
You and I be the singers!

He came singing faith
And he lived singing faith
He died singing faith
He arose in silence
For the faith to go on
We must make it our song
You and I be the singers!

He came singing hope
And he lived singing hope
He died singing hope
He arose in silence
**For the hope to go on
For must make it our song
You and I be the singers!**

He came singing peace
And he lived singing peace
He died singing peace.
He arose in silence
**For the peace to go on
We must make it our song
You and I be the singers!**

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS

OFFERING AND DEDICATION

HYMN – AA 8

Brother sister let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you,
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
We are travellers on the road,
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night-time of your fear,
I will hold my hand out to you
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping
When you laugh, I will laugh with you
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love, and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you,
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant too.

SHARED GRACE

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.