

“Treasures for Today and Tomorrow”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
July 30, 2023 - Ninth Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 12

[Genesis 29:15-28; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52](#)

Have you noticed that a lot of people are wearing pink these days? Do we have any pink-wearers here today? The sudden crush of those who are flush in blush is likely due to the massive popularity of the recently released *Barbie* movie by director Greta Gerwig, which brought in over 350 million dollars over the course of its opening weekend and has now grossed over 600 million dollars worldwide. Perhaps you were among the throngs of movie-goers who saw the film (if so, perhaps you joined Tom Cruise and many other Americans in making it a “Barbenheimer” by watching both the *Barbie* movie and Christopher Nolan’s film *Oppenheimer* as a double-header).

If you’ve seen the film, you know that one of the themes addressed in the *Barbie* movie, related to one of the themes in our scripture reading from Genesis, is patriarchy. This term for men holding power, wielding authority, and running things is used several times in the *Barbie* movie alone, which points out with campy humor the ridiculousness of this arrangement, that half of the world’s people should have power over the other half simply because they are men. I agree that this is ridiculous, but we know all too well, that this is a ridiculous and life-limiting reality that many people around the world have experienced since the dawn of time and that is still operative in our own society.

The ridiculous arrangement of men ruling women is seen in our scripture lesson from Genesis, which continues the story that we’ve been following for the past several weeks of the beginnings of the family of Israel. We read in previous weeks about how God called Abram to leave his kin in Mesopotamia to begin a new life and family in an unknown, distant land of God’s choosing. Abram followed God’s command, and God promised Abram and Sarai that God would bless them with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky who would bring God’s blessing to the whole world. Through the miraculous intervention of God, elderly and renamed Abraham and his wife Sarah had a child named Isaac who inherited God’s promise and passed it on to his own child Jacob. Today’s lesson tells of how Jacob, also called as Israel, came to acquire two wives, who would

become, along with two other women serving them as slaves, the mothers of the 12 sons who would lead the 12 tribes of Israel. In following the patriarchal tradition of the day, Jacob was given his two wives Leah and Rachel and their servants Zilpah and Bilhah, by their all-powerful father Laban, only after Jacob paid for them through 14 years of labor. The power over their lives was then transferred from their swindling father Laban to their husband Jacob, who then ruled over his own household.

Now some see in this long and winding story of the patriarchal beginnings of the people of Israel examples of behaviors and family systems that people are to follow, that they present us with “biblical family values” to be used a guide for our own family systems and behaviors. While these stories are part of the sacred literature of our tradition, I do not see in them behavioral models for us to thoughtlessly follow. The ways of people that we’ve read about in Genesis, of some people -- men -- having power over other people as their owners, people deceiving and swindling others, of people creating and living in conflict with their families and neighbors, do not provide God’s plan for us and they are not values we should embrace.

But these are sacred stories for us to consider and reconsider as we can learn from the messy brokenness of our spiritual ancestors and their systems that lift up some at the expense of others. We can see how God’s gift of life and blessing upon it can be limited by human actions or furthered by it, and we can change our own ways of living and our systems that guide those behaviors to come closer to the plan of flourishing life that God has for all of us. And we can see that even in the midst of the mess of humanity, God is at work, moving us to leave old life-limiting ways behind and become more of the life-givers and life-builders that God has created us to be.

Embracing ways of living that are life-giving and life-growing for all is God’s plan for us, and the more we can adopt this plan, the more God’s love will reign over us and expand throughout the world, blessing us, our neighbors, the world’s other creatures, and the planet we share as our home.

When Jesus tells us, as we read in our gospel lesson from Matthew, of the growing realm of heaven on earth, this is what Jesus envisions. He sees a realm that is more of a *kindom* than *kingdom*, where God reigns and brings peace and

life, not through coercion, but through people giving and growing life by selflessly serving one another in love. Jesus tells us that this blessed realm of God is like a tiny mustard seed that is planted and grows and spreads. Likewise, he tells us that God's growing realm of love is like yeast that is kneaded into some dough, doing its work, though unseen at first, until it visibly grows and expands the whole batch. Jesus tells us that this realm, where God's love is ever-growing, is priceless, like a great pearl or fantastic treasure, and that being part of it and its work is worth giving our whole selves.

This is the precious realm we belong to, and its values of loving and lifting up all people rather than taking from them for our own gain are to guide us, the values we claim as our own, and the society we work to create for the generations to come. May the priceless treasure of God's way of love be buried in each of our hearts and minds and may this treasure guide us today and tomorrow and always. Amen.