

Life in Christ  
Genesis 21:8-21; Matthew 10:24-39  
June 25, 2023  
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When our son Preston was in the 5th grade, he came home one day talking about the HyperBowl that he learned about. We were kind of confused and had him describe what a HyperBowl was. He said it was an exaggeration. “Oh ok, a Hyperbole,” we said. His teacher grew up in Cuba and had taught mostly Spanish. Preston was in Spanish Immersion. His teacher did not know the correct pronunciation.

Well Hyperbowl or Hyperbole, of course, means “exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally.” When Jesus talks of a disciples relationship with their own family, he is exaggerating for effect, most scholars agree. The parallel account to the Matthew text in Luke says, “If anyone come to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple.” You see Jesus was creating a new kind of family, one where loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself was priority. Putting God first binds people together. Obviously Jesus does not want us to hate our own family. I am just back from being with my family; we laughed so much and shared memories that made us all feel young again.

Plymouth Presbyterian Church you are a family. You take care of each other and are committed to one another. You are the family of God.

I have enjoyed being your interim pastor for the past year and a half, but it is time for me to move on. My last Sunday will be July 23rd and the search for your next long term pastor is on. This is an exciting time, and a time for prayer and discernment. It is not a Hyperbowl or a hyperbole to say that my husband Ryan and I have loved our time with you and will continue to lift you up in prayer together. Know that your pastors come and go but you stay together. You aren't bound together by the pastor but by a common love of God.

Never doubt God's great love for you.

Another part of the Gospel lesson, speaks of the tender love that God has for us, even to know how many hairs are on our heads. Even the small things are worth praying about.

Our Old Testament lesson is a painful one where Hagar whose name in Hebrew means "the foreigner" is cast out into the desert wilderness with her son Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn. They both cry out to God and God hears them fulfilling the very meaning of the name Ishmael which in Hebrew means "God will hear." In the Jewish tradition the word hear is Shema. The

“Shema” is the verse שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד She-ma yisrael, adonai eloheinu, adonai echad. “Hear O’ Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.” from Deuteronomy 6.

Hearing meant that obedience and prioritizing God would follow. Action followed. When God heard Hagar and Ishmael, God acted to save them and provided water and a future life, even creating a nation out of them. Ishmael married an Egyptian woman.

As Plymouth continues to be a family with a long history of service and love, remember to hear like God does, even those cast out, even the foreign ones and remember to love them with actions like God does.

In my short time here I have seen your love in many ways. You have collected items and money for the community and you have shared love with the residents of Avamere. You have visited one another in times of illness and cared for one another in times of grief. You laugh together and eat together like a family. Continue to grow together, rooted and grounded in love, and reaching out with the fruits that result from your solid foundation.

We are a few weeks out from Pentecost but how grateful we can be for the gift of the church created and knit together in the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is strong in you. I wonder what will be next for Plymouth. I hope you will wonder with me in

that. Let us wonder in hope and trust knowing that God has been faithful and will continue to be faithful in our individual lives and in the life of Plymouth Presbyterian Church. Think if God knows the hairs on our heads, God knows who the next pastor will be; God knows how many pieces of music are in the room behind the sanctuary; God knows how many baskets are upstairs in the loft. God knows and hears the hopes and dreams of each of us here. I'd like to close with a prayer.

Dear Lord, We love you with all our hearts, our minds and our strength. We love our neighbor as ourselves. We are filled with love. We are filled with hope. We silently now begin to express our hopes to you trusting that you hear us and you care. Hear our silent prayers...

Amen.