

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Fourth Sunday in Lent
 March 30, 2025
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“So then brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”

I want to speak this morning of St Paul’s Epistle for the week.
 It contains two allegories, cleverly blended together:
 One about bondage versus freedom;
 And the other about the Earthly vs the Heavenly Jerusalem.

In the first allegory, Paul takes us all the way back to Genesis
 No. Not the car, the Holy Scripture.
 And the story of Abraham and Sarah, husband and wife.
 The couple God chose to found
 A new people
 A new nation.
 A new religion.
 Out of which came Christianity.

Now Abraham and Sarah were, in the delicate words of the King
 James Bible; “well stricken with age.”
 (Something I am beginning to appreciate).

They had everything anybody could want in those days;
 Land
 Abundant crops
 Flocks of Sheep
 Good people working for them
 But they lacked one thing;
 the one thing they wanted most in this world;
 A child.

And in their advanced age
 They had long ago lost all expectancy of ever having a child.
 Paul succinctly and accurately retells the story:

God selected them to be the parents of a new nation
 And promised them a child to allow it to happen.

Sarah would conceive and they would have a son.
 We can only imagine their astonishment and delight.

One thing I've learned about those well stricken with age
 Is that they are well stricken with impatience as well.

Sarah and Abraham waited and waited

But there was no child.

After a time they decided to take things into their own hands.

Under Hebrew law,

a child conceived through what we would call
 a surrogate mother,

was treated as the legal child of Sarah and Abraham.

Under the custom and law Sarah chose the woman who would bear
 their child: she chose her Egyptian slave, Hagar.

Soon a son was born and Abram and Sara named him Ishmael.

But soon after that, Abram and Sarah had their own son: Isaac.

So there were two sons;

Ishmael the first born, was a son only by virtue of the law

And Isaac who was born in fulfillment of the promise of God

The inevitable happened, and

Abram resolved the enmity that erupted between Hagar and Sara

And the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael,

By banishing Hagar and Ishmael as God had instructed him.

And so, Isaac the son of the promise of God

Was the inheritor and received the blessing

And carried on the ancestral line

that became the Jewish faith and nation.

That is the well-known history,
 the story that Paul turns into an allegory.

Paul points out that Hagar was a slave, a bondswoman of Arab descent from the desert near Mt Sinai.
 Sinai, of course, evokes the time that God gave Moses the Law.
 And Ishmael, her son was the son of Sarah and Abraham
 Only by virtue of the Law.
 Ishmael was born of the flesh, that is; by human act
 And not by the supernatural power of God.
 So, in the allegory, Hagar and Ishmael represent the Law.

By contrast, Paul describes Sarah was a free woman,
 the mother of us all,
 And Isaac as a son born by the miracle of God.
 The son born of the free woman.

Paul then quietly blends in the second allegory:
 Hagar and her descendents were in bondage
 to the earthly Jerusalem.
 Which for Paul represented those under the yoke of the Law.

But Sarah and her descendents were of God and the heavenly Jerusalem described in the psalms.
 They represent the freedom and liberty of Jesus, the Christ.

The allegories mark the distinctions between
 The two mothers and
 The two sons,
 But also two covenants:
 The original covenant between Abraham, Sarah and God
 And the later covenant given through Moses and the Law.

Paul cleverly crafted the allegories in light of this reality:
 Over the centuries since Sinai,
 Jewish temple leaders, rabbis and scholars of the day
 Came to the conclusion that salvation for the Jewish people
 Could only be achieved by the Law.
 That is; it was the Law that brought salvation.

Paul knew better.
 It was only by and through Jesus that anyone
 Can spend eternity with God in heaven.
 And that Jesus offered true freedom from the bondage of the
 Law.
 Apart from Christ,
 there can be only bondage to sin under the yoke of the law
 but in Christ there is true liberty and freedom.

Here is the clever twist;
 In the allegory
 the people who looked to the Law for their salvation
 were represented by Ishmael,
 the father of the hated Ishmaelites,
 who was cast out.
 And Paul equated his Jewish readers
 who believed their salvation was through the law
 with the Ishmaelites of the allegory.
 They must have been furious.

Paul points out that the covenant of Sinai and Moses had been
 corrupted.
 It was the original covenant with Abraham and Sarah that
 remained pure.

So what does it mean for us
 All these centuries and thousands of miles later?

At this time of Lent, as we dredge up the awful times of our sins
and seek absolution,

We need to keep our life goal in mind: heavenly life eternal.

And that the pathway is opened by the Grace of God an our
diligence

And that it is in Christ that there is true liberty and freedom.

We must ignore all the noise and distraction

The ignorant claims and the clamor.

There is no easy substitute for the hard work you are doing.

Paul sums it up at the end of the Epistle:

“So then, brethren,

we are not children of the bondwoman,

but of the free.”

The very next verse,

omitted by the Reformers

sums it up even better:

“Stand fast therefore

in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

And be not entangled again

with the yoke of bondage.”

