

People of God Behaving Badly!
(Excuses, Excuses, Excuses)
Genesis 21:8-21; Romans 6:1b-11

Rev. Kenneth M. Locke, Interim Pastor
St Paul United Church of Christ, New Bremen, OH
June 25, 2023; 12 Sunday in Ordinary Time

Several years ago, an older lady in my congregation gave me a piece of counted-cross stitch. You know what I'm talking about. Fancy needlework. She had done it herself and was justifiably proud of it. It was very well done. I thanked her but said I couldn't read it. It was letters and words but I didn't know what they meant. She said, "It's Latin. It means, 'Don't get good at making excuses.'" Don't get good at making excuses.

Hmm. Well. What was I supposed to think about that? Was it just something she had done and thought I would appreciate? Was it a saying that was important to her and she thought I would like it? Was it some sort of passive-aggressive dig? Was she trying to make a point? I don't know. I really don't.

But I have to say, ever since then, when things have started going badly, when something I've been working on starts falling apart, I find myself thinking, "OK, Ken. This is no time for making excuses. Figure out what's wrong and fix it." I don't know if she meant for that gift to have an effect on me, but it certainly did. And it still does.

It's a good lesson for all of us, really. Don't get good at making excuses. Don't get good at making excuses, especially when it's our fault. The reality is from time to time we all make mistakes. We are all at fault in something. We are sinful creatures, fallen short of the grace and glory of God. You, me, even the best of us. Even the heroes of our faith can behave badly. Sometimes inexcusably badly.

In our Old Testament lesson, Sarah loses it. She is overcome with jealousy. Ishmael isn't going to inherit. Of course not. But

she's jealous and afraid and angry so she behaves horribly towards Hagar. Sarah's behavior is inexcusable.

And Abraham is no better. Come on, Abraham. This is a patriarchal culture. Act like it! Do something. Take charge of the situation. Grow a spine. Don't blame it all on Sarah. It's as much your fault as hers.

If you want an example of how not to behave, if you want an example of inexcusable behavior, you don't have to look any farther than this passage.

You also don't have to go any farther than Romans, chapter 6, our New Testament Lesson. In Romans chapter 5, Paul explains God's grace is greater than our sin. God's grace is unlimited. God's grace is always greater than our sin.

But then, some smarty pants in the back pew sticks their hand up and says, "Does that mean we should try to sin even more so God's grace will be even greater? Is more and more sinning a good thing, because it shows more and more of God's grace?"

Paul replies, "No! No! Absolutely not!"

The Greek expression here is *May Genoita*. *May Genoita*. It's the strongest **No** you can say in Greek. It is the absolute, strongest possible **No**. Paul is making his point in the strongest way he can. He's telling the people to sit up. Pay attention. Remember this. We do not sin in order to provoke God into being gracious. As Christians we are dead to sin. We have nothing to do with it. We are dead to sin and alive to God. We are dead to sin and alive to God.

And yet, and yet, we still sin, don't we? Even Paul, a few chapters later, is going to say, "The good I want to do, I do not do. But the sin I don't want to do, that's what I do." Even Paul sinned. We all sin. We all sin, we all get anxious about it, and soon we start making excuses. We start making excuses to God. Perhaps we get rather good at it.

Friends, here is the good news of God. Here is the good news of God. If you remember nothing else today remember this. Write this down, put it in your pocket, take it home and look at it. The good news of God is, with God we have nothing to fear! God loves us just the way we are. We don't need to get good at making excuses. God loves us just the way we are.

Even when we behave badly, we don't need an excuse. Even when we behave inexcusably, we don't need an excuse. The good news of God is God loves us just the way we are.

The Bible is littered with people of God behaving badly. The good news is God loved them just the way they were. Paul persecuted the church. God loved him just the way he was. Abraham and Sarah's behavior towards Hagar and Ishmael was inexcusable. But God loved them just the way they were. And this is how God loves us.

Perhaps you've never done anything on a par with Abraham and Sarah. I hope not. But the reality is in this earthly life, sin is constantly pulling on us. Sometimes it pulls us down. Sometimes sin pulls us so hard we fall and shatter into a million pieces.

But when we do, we don't need to make excuses. By God's help we can get up, confess our sins, and continue our Christian journey, knowing God loves us just the way we are. My beloved, this is how much God loves us. Thanks be to God! Amen.