

**Sermon, Season of Pentecost
June 25, 2017
The Reverend Lois Keen
Trinity Episcopal Church
Collinsville, Connecticut Supply**

Genesis 21:8-21

Psalms 86:1-10, 16-17

Romans 6:1b-11

Matthew 10:24-39

**When I lose my way
and I forget my name
remind me who I am**

Do you ever need to be reminded who you really are? Do you ever call yourself names? Loser? failure? stupid? waste of time? screw-up? unwanted? I hope not, but I know I do it to myself – I call myself “stupid woman” when I get frustrated. And I know I’m not alone because I don’t have enough fingers and toes to count the number of times I’ve told someone, “You are not allowed to call yourself stupid around me” when they have just done that very thing.

The music video of Jason Gray’s song “Remind Me Who I Am”, opens with Jason singing the song as he travels down a road, and on his travels he meets and photographs people. Each of the people holds up a sign which tells us what each person thinks of themselves.

The first person’s sign reads, “I don’t matter”. The next signs read, “Regrets only”, then “They used me”, “addict”, “victim”, “angry”, “weak”, “refugee”, “rejected”, “anxious”, “betrayed”, “empty”, “cheater”, “illegal”, “My *life* doesn’t matter”.

And all the time, as we are seeing these people holding up these signs, Jason Gray is singing,

**When I lose my way, and I forget my name, remind me who I am.
In the mirror all I see is who I don’t want to be. Remind me who I am.**

Hagar is in the desert.

She was Sarah’s slave. God had promised Abraham, Sarah’s husband, that he would have a son in Sarah’s old age who would make Abraham the patriarch of a people whose number would be greater than the stars in the sky or the sands on the shore. But Sarah was barren. She had had no child. So she thought nothing of ordering her slave, Sarah, to go in to Abraham’s tent and give him a son in her name. After all, Hagar was only property. She had no will in the matter.

Hagar has succeeded where Sarah failed. She has a son. His name is Ishmael. Soon after, Sarah herself, though she is way past childbearing years, becomes pregnant. Now she,

too, has a son, Isaac. Though Hagar's son was born first, Isaac is the true, legitimate heir because he comes from Abraham's wife, not from a slave. But Sarah doesn't trust Hagar, or Ishmael, or even Abraham. Ishmael's very existence is a threat to Sarah and to Isaac. She is afraid of him. So she orders Abraham to banish Hagar, to send her and Ishmael out into the wilderness, to let them die.

When my heart is like a stone and I'm running far from home, remind me who I am.

In her fear, Sarah needs to be reminded who she really is, and maybe some day she will know. But not today.

**When I can't receive your love, afraid I'll never be enough, remind me who I am.
(sings Jason Gray)**

So here is Hagar. Abraham has given her a skin of water. But now it is empty. It's been empty a long time. Ishmael is crying from thirst. Names like loser, brood-mare, worthless, failure, slave, run through Hagar's mind. Her son will die before her eyes and there's nothing she can do. She puts him under a bush in the shade, and goes a ways off, and in her helplessness, her lostness, her total despair, she turns her face to heaven and weeps.

And God hears Hagar. And an angel of God calls to her, reminding her who she is. She is not broodmare or slave or loser or failure.

She is Rescued. Mother-of-a-Nation. Beloved.

Beloved.

Beloved.

And there, through her tears, Hagar sees the well of water. She fills the skin and she and the child drink. And they live. And they go on their way. Beloved.

"In the loneliest places, when I can't remember what grace is, Tell me who I am to You..."

In Jason Gray's music video there is also a turning point. He returns to the people with their signs, and now the signs all read – **Beloved**.

Did the woman think "I don't matter"? Now she knows. She is beloved. Did the man identify himself as only an addict? Now he knows – beloved. All those people – angry, regretful, weak, refugee, rejected, meaningless, anxious, betrayed, empty, cheating, illegal, ill-used all, all, now, know themselves to be **Beloved**.

"If I'm your beloved," Jason Gray sings, **"If I'm Your beloved, can You help me believe it"?**

Tell me once again who I am to you, who I am to you

Tell me lest I forget

who I am to you, that I belong to you. Tell me...

This is what Jesus is telling the disciples in today's gospel.

He says, the crowds call me names, and if you follow me, they'll do the same to you. But you are mine. You are my household. So don't be silenced by the name-calling and threats of the bullies. Remember who you are. You are mine, and you are Beloved.

And when those you love, and who love you, turn against you because of me, even your parents, your own family, remember who you are and whose you are. Beloved.

Leave those others to me. All will come right in the fullness of time. For now, know this, It's to ME you will be going home, in the end of all things. You are my beloved, Jesus says. You belong to me. Beloved.

The next time you find yourself calling yourself names and putting yourself down, remember Hagar, how worthless she felt, and how God set her right, and say to yourself, Beloved Child of God.

The next time you are tempted to put someone else down or call them names in your mind, remember Sarah and how she treated Hagar, and how doing that was not good for Sarah's soul, and say to yourself, Sarah, too, was a beloved child of God, and so is this person, and so am I, all, all beloved children of God.

And when you feel abandoned by God

In the loneliest places, when you can't remember what grace is, remember the sparrow, and how valuable she is in God's sight, and how much more valuable you must be also, in Jesus's eyes.

And wait, and watch, and listen for Jesus to lift up your soul. For great is God's love toward all creation, and you are beloved.