**Check your Assumptions**

**June 2, 2024 Pentecost 2**

Genesis 20: 1-13 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Today we have a reading that I have not preached on before, as it is not in the lectionary, the list of readings, we often use. We are using a different lectionary this year which provides an opportunity to hear scripture preached that we may not have heard much before. Because these ones are not in the Common Lectionary, it also means there are less resources online for preparation. I am glad I didn’t have to record the sermon this week, as it might have been received later than would be preferred, given I didn’t get this written until yesterday!

Our focus will be on the Genesis story, Abraham and Sarah are on a journey to the land God has promised them, a land flowing with milk and honey, but they don’t know yet, where that is. So, they travel with God and faith. Sarah was barren, but has been told she will bear a son, to be named Isaac, and that they will be blessed and their offspring will form many nations. Sarah laughed when she overheard God’s messengers talking with Abraham telling him she will have a child. She was already very old and yet God is telling them she will have a child? They said to her, ‘is anything too wonderful for the Lord?’ And so they have embarked on this journey and in todays reading are found in the region of Negeb, in the city of Gerar, where Abimelech was king.

Now Abraham assumed the worst of this gentile King Abimelech and that he would kill Abraham if he knew that he was married to Sarah, so they had arranged that Sarah would say she was his sister. This is the second time that Abraham passes Sarah off as his sister to save himself. It can seem a little selfish, and very patriarchal, for there didn’t seem to be much concern what would happen to Sarah as she was taken by the king. Did he devise this plan, forgetting that God was with them? Indeed, God was with them as Abimelech experiences God in a dream, telling him that he will lose his life if he lays with Sarah, because she is married to Abraham. God intervenes to disrupt the sexist and self preservationist behaviour, and Abimelech proves to be a king of good and generous character.

As we notice and reflect on this story, there are elements of male dominance and sexism that unfortunately do not seem to have changed much over time. We only need to look at the news cycle this week to see it. A [report](https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadian-military-colleges-sexual-assault-misconduct-survey-1.7217449) came out this week identifying that 5% of women attending Canadian military colleges surveyed in 2023 said they were sexually attacked during the previous 12 months by being threatened, held down or hurt and forced into unwanted sexual acts. That rate goes up to 9% of women surveyed describing being sexually assaulted while drugged, intoxicated or manipulated in some way. Some may think this is not a very high percentage, but one is too many and most students, especially women, said they had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in the previous year such as sexual jokes, inappropriate comments about their bodies or unwanted touching. Toxic masculinity that breeds this behaviour continues to be rampant.

Another example of this is the trial of former president Donald Trump we have been hearing about these last few weeks. The trial is based on Trump falsifying documents to cover up payments to a porn star he had a sexual liaison with. While he denies everything, including ever meeting with Stephanie A Gregory Clifford, also known as Stormy Daniels, the evidence is pretty clear that he engaged in this sexist behaviour and even acknowledged after the guilty verdict that it was a non-disclosure agreement. Why would he need a non-disclosure agreement with her, if he’s never met her? It is very concerning that a former president can engage in this kind of behaviour, break the law, and still be able to be on the ballot as a presidential candidate. We seem to value power much more than women and integrity in many sectors of our society. Too often we hear the comment that boys will be boys, or it’s just locker room talk. All this contributes to society being a dangerous place for women. So much so that most women would prefer to be alone with a [bear in the woods](https://theconversation.com/why-women-would-prefer-to-be-alone-in-the-woods-with-a-bear-than-a-man-229140) than a man they didn’t know. This will only change when we as men are willing to change our behaviour, challenge our friends’ and colleagues behaviour and teach our sons how to be decent, compassionate caring men who understand the issues of consent and appropriate sexual behaviour.

From the story of Abraham today, we know that God does not accept this behaviour, calling out King Abimelech who was intending to take Sarah to his bed. In turn Abimelech called out Abraham for his lies and his behaviour, which was based on fear and the assumption that Abimelech would hurt Abraham. Abimelech basically asks, what have I done to you, to be treated in this way? Abraham assumed that because the city was not ‘god-fearing’ that he would be killed because of his wife. An assumption that got him into trouble and affected Sarah as well. What kind of assumptions do we make about people because they believe differently than we do, think differently than we do, or behave differently than we do? When have you been caught or surprised by someone or someplace that turned out to be better than you thought or assumed? How much do we assume people are bad because of where they are from, or what they believe in these days ? I wonder how much we assume these days that all Russians are bad, or think badly of them because of their president engaging in the war against Ukraine? We seem to see evidence of these kinds of assumptions against both Jewish and Palestinian people as the war between the Israeli government and Hamas wages on. Can we separate the state from the people? The militant group from the people? Are we able to hold two realities at the same time: that the Hamas’ October 7 attack was a horrific inhumane attack on innocent Jewish people, and the Israeli government’s response is amounting to state terrorism leading to genocide? To assume that all Palestinians want the eradication of the Jewish state or it’s people, and that all Jewish people want the eradication of Palestinian, is to make the same kind of error that Abraham did. God calls us to be better, to do better. To love and compassion and peace and justice. God calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves, whether our neighbour is near or far, Christian or Jew, slave or free, male or female. God’s love empowers us to be humane, giving people the benefit of the doubt, thinking the best of others, not the worst. If we all did this, the world would be a much better place.

May we challenge sexism, toxic masculinity, and uphold the dignity and equity of women in our day-to-day life. May we work to challenge our assumptions about people based on who they are or their associations. May we live a love for justice that works for peace with compassion for all in the world.